

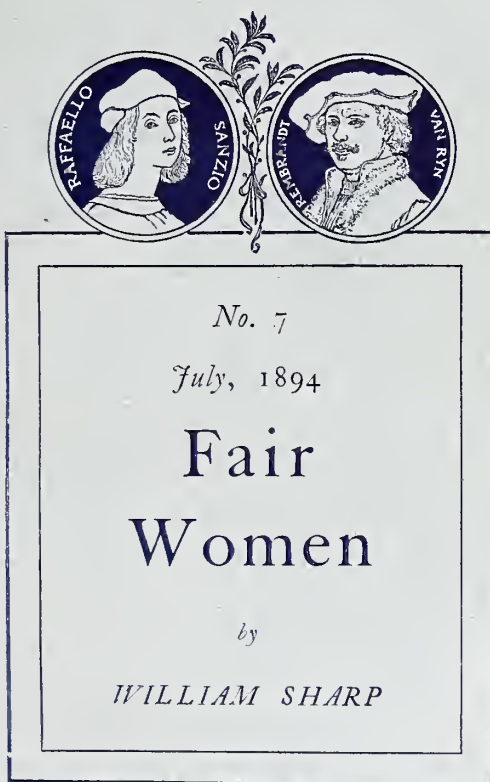
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THE
PORTFOLIO

MONOGRAPHS ON ARTISTIC SUBJECTS

EDITED BY P. G. HAMERTON

PUBLISHED MONTHLY



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FAIR WOMEN

IN PAINTING AND POETRY

By

WILLIAM SHARP

Author of "Sospiri di Roma," "Life of Heine," &c.



LONDON

SEELEY AND CO. LIMITED, ESSEX STREET, STRAND

NEW YORK, MACMILLAN AND CO.

1894

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FAIR WOMEN

PART I

“Tennyson has no prescriptive right to *A Dream of Fair Women*. Every man dreams this dream. With some it happens early in the teens. It fades, with some, during the twenties. With others it endures, vivid and beautiful under grey hairs, till it glorifies the grave.”—H. P. SIWÄARMILL.

I

THE beauty of women : could there be any theme more inspiring ? There is fire in the phrase even. But, as with “Love,” “Life,” “Sunshine,” “the Sea,” “Death,” the subject at once allures and evades one. It would be easier to write concerning it a bulky tome than a small volume, and that again would be less difficult than a sketch of this kind. Who can say much about love, without vain repetitions ? Only the poet—whether he use pigments or clay, words or music—can flash upon us some new light, or thrill us with some new note, or delight us with some new vision. There is nothing between this quintessential revelation and that unaccomplished and for ever to be unaccomplished History of Love which Charles Nodier said would be the history of humanity and the most beautiful book to write.

What mortal can say enough about the beauty of woman to satisfy himself ? How much less can he say enough to satisfy others ?

“For several virtues have I liked several women” : and we may adapt Shakespere’s line, and say that for several kinds of beauty have men admired women as different from each other as a contadina of the Campagna and an Eskimo Squaw.

I realise my inadequacy. I would have my readers understand that if I were to write as I feel, I would speak not wisely but too well !

Fortunately, I cannot rhapsodise : but for this, I might win honour in the eyes of ladies, and concurrently a very natural outpouring of envy and all uncharitableness on the part of my fellow-men. Personally, I would have no hard-and-fast dogmas. Fair Women, be they tall or short, dark or fair, vivacious or languorous, active or indolent, plump or fragile, if all are beautiful all are welcome. You, camerado, may incline towards a blonde, with hair touched with gold and eyes haunted by a living memory of the sky, small of stature, and with hands seductively white and delicate : I, on the other hand, may prefer a brunette, with hair lovely with the dusk and fragrance of twilight, with eyes filled with strange lights and depths of shadow, tall, lissom, and with the nut-brown kisses of the sun just visible on cheek and neck, and bonnie deft hands. Or, it may be, I find Ideala in a sweet comeliness : a face and figure and mien and manner which together allure a male mind searching for the quietudes rather than for the exaltations of passionate life. You, however, may worship at another shrine, and seek your joy in austere beauty, or in that which seems wedded to a tragic significance, or that whose very remoteness lays upon you an irresistible spell. There be those who prefer Diana to Venus, who would live with Minerva rather than Juno : who would rather espouse Syrinx than Semele, and prefer the shy Arethusa to the somewhat heedless Leda. Who shall blame a man if he would rather take to wife Lucy Desborough than Helen of Troy : and has any one among us right to take up a stone against him who would bestow the "Mrs." at his disposal upon Dolly Varden rather than upon Cleopatra ?

After all, are the poets and painters the right people to go to for instruction as to beauty ? Most of them are disappointed married men. Every male loves three females : woman (that is, his particular woman), as he imagines her to be ; woman, as he finds her ; and woman, carefully revised for an improbable new edition.

II

In the beginning, said a Persian poet, Allah took a rose, a lily, a dove, a serpent, a little honey, a Dead Sea apple, and a handful of clay. When He looked at the amalgam it was Woman. Then He thought He would resolve these constituents. But it was too late. Adam had taken

her to wife, and humanity had begun. Woman, moreover, had learned her first lesson : conveyed in the parable of the rib. Thus early did the male imagination begin to weave a delightful web for its own delectation and advantage. When, after a time, the daughters of Eve convinced the sons of Adam that a system of Dual Control would have to be put into effect, there was much questioning and heartburning. Satan availed himself of the opportunity. He took man aside, and explained to him that woman had been reasonless and precipitate, that she had tempted him before she was ripe, and that he was a genial innocent and very much to be pitied. Further, he demonstrated that if she had only waited a little, all would have been well. But, as it was, the rose had a thorn, the lily had a tendency to be fragile, the dove had not lost its timidity, the serpent had retained its guile, its fangs, and its poison, the honey was apt to clog, the Dead Sea apple was almost entirely filled with dust, and the clay was of the tough, primeval kind, difficult to blend with advantage, and impossible to eliminate.

From that day, says the Persian poet, whose name I have forgotten, man has been haunted by the idea that he was wheedled into a copartnery. In a word, having taken woman to wife, he now regrets that he committed himself quite so early to a formal union. From his vague regrets and unsatisfied longings, and a profound egotism which got into his system during his bachelor days in Eden, he evolved the idea of Beauty. This idea would have remained a dream if Satan had not interfered with the suggestion that it was too good to be wasted as an abstraction. So the idea came to be realised. There was much hearty laughter in consequence, in "another place." Seeing what a perilous state man had brought himself into, Allah had pity. He took man's conception of Beauty—which to His surprise was in several respects much superior to Eve—and, having dissipated it with a breath, reweave it into a hundred lovely ideals. Then, making of the residue a many-coloured span in the heavens, He sent these back to Earth, each to gleam thenceforth with the glory of that first rainbow.

It is a fantasy. But let us thank that Eastern poet. Perhaps, poor dreamer, he went home to learn that unpunctual spouses must expect reproaches in lieu of dinner, or even, it may be, to find that his soul's Sultana had eloped with a more worldly admirer of Eve. Zuleika, if

he found her, perhaps he convinced. For us he has put into words, with some prolixity and awkwardness no doubt, what in a vague way we all feel about the beauty of women.

For in truth there is no such abstraction as Womanly Beauty. Instead, there is the beauty of women.

Every man can pick and choose. There are as many kinds of women as there are of flowers : and all are beautiful, for some quality, or by association. It is well to admire every type. Companionship with the individual will thus be rendered more pleasing ! As the late Maxime du Camp said somewhere : " In the matter of admiration, it is not bad to have several maladies." There are men who, in this way, are chronic invalids. Women are very patient with them.

I do not agree with an acquaintance of mine who avers that his predilections are climatic in their nature. If he is in Italy he loves the Roman contadina, or the Sicilian with the lissom Greek figure : if in Spain, he thinks flashing black eyes and coarse hair finer than the flax and sky-blue he admired so much in Germany : if in Japan, he vows with Pierre Loti that Madame Chrysanthème is more winsome than the daintiest Parisienne : if in Barbary, he forgets the wild-rose bloom and hill-wind freshness of his English girl, to whom when he roams through Britain he makes the Helen to his Paris, forgets for the sake of shadowy gazelle-eyes and languorous beauty like that of the lotus on warm moonlight nights. I wonder where he is now. He has been in many lands. I know he has loved a Lithuanian, and passioned for a Swede : and when I last saw him, less than a year ago, he said his ideal was the Celtic *maigh-deann*. Perhaps he is far distant, in that very Cathay which I remember his saying was a country to be taken on trust, as one accepts the actuality of the North Pole : if so, I am convinced he is humming blithely

"She whom I love at present is in China :
She dwells, with her aged parents,
In a tower of fine porcelain,
By the yellow stream where the cormorants are."¹

¹ " *Celle que j'aime à présent, est en Chine ;
Elle demeure, avec ses vieux parents,
Dans une tour de porcelaine fine,
Au fleuve jaune où sont les cormorans.*"

(Théophile Gautier.)

This is too generously eclectic for me, who am a lover of moderation, and a monogamist by instinct. Nevertheless, I can appreciate this climatic variability. I am no stickler for the supremacy of any one type, of the civilised over the barbaric, of the deftly arrayed over the austere ungarbed! With one of the authors of *Le Croix de Berny* I can say: "Dress has very little weight with me. I once admired a Granada gipsy whose sole costume consisted of blue slippers and a necklace of amber beads."

Nowadays, we have to admire the nude only in sculpture, and that antique. M. Béranger in Paris, Mr. Horsley, R.A., and a Glasgow bailie have said so.

Well, well, it may be so. But there are unregenerate men among us. Perhaps this new madness of blindness will supersede the old intoxication. Truly, I am

"Oft in doubt whether at all
I shall again see Phœbus in the morning,
Or a white Naiad in a rippling stream—"

but I have no doubt whatever that others will. Meanwhile we can dream of youth: the youth of the past, the eternal youth, and the hour-long youth we have known ourselves. It is one of the sunbright words. These five letters have an alchemy that can transmute dust and ashes into blossoms and fruit. For those who know this, the beauty of the past is linked to the present tense: the most ancient things live again, and the more keenly. *Antiquitas saeculi juvenus mundi*.

Well, sufficient unto this present is the question of the nude! Let those who will, ignore it. Whatever these may say, there is always this conviction for loyal Pagans to fall back upon—in the words of George Meredith—"the visible fair form of a woman is hereditary queen of us."

III

What a blight upon ordered sequence in narrative, phrase dear to the grammarian, discursiveness is! Yet I cannot help it: to borrow from George Meredith on the subject of fair women, from Lucy Desborough and Rhoda Fleming to Clotilde von Rüdiger and Diana Warwick and Aminta Ormont, is as seductive as the sound of the sea when one is panting on the inland side of a sand-dune. In sheer self-defence I must

find an apothegm so good that it would be superfluous to go further. This is irrational perhaps : but then with Diana I find that "to be pointedly rational is a greater difficulty to me than a fine delirium." There are Fair Women, and fair sayings about fair women, in each of these ever delightful twelve novels. Epigrammatically, *The Egoist* and *Beauchamp's Career* would probably afford most spoil to the hunter : but here in *Richard Feverel* is the quintessential phrase for which we wait. "*Each woman is Eve throughout the ages.*"

This might have been the motto for the catalogue of the "Fair Women" exhibition at the Grafton Gallery. For, truly, to every lover the woman of his choice is another Eve. He sees in her the ideal prototype. It is well that this is so : otherwise there would be no poetry, no fiction, and scarce any emotional literature save passionate Malthusian tractates !

Despite the resemblance, to a fashion of the moment, in the dressing of the hair of the Graeco-Roman lady who leads off the delightful show in question ; and even of the antique Beauty herself to some among her remote sisters in these latter days ; I doubt if the most fervent idealist would be able to discern his Dream in this particular Fair Woman, or rather this effigy of her, which has been rescued from a mummy-case in Egypt. But the Greek, or Roman, or Graeco-Roman, who may have painted her may have found her passing fair—a face to dream of, to die for ! Thus blithely goes the whirligig of change.

It is not often that picture-gallery catalogues contain either humour or philosophy. There is a naive humour, a genial philosophy, in the prefatory note to that of the Grafton Exhibition. "As," so the note runs, "there are included certain pictures of Women possibly more celebrated for their historical interest, their influence, or their wit than for their beauty, some exception has been taken to the title of the Exhibition. The Directors, however, do not know of any fixed standard by which such pictures can be judged, and, further, they believe that in the eyes of some one person, at least, almost every woman has been considered fair."

In other words : "Each woman is Eve throughout the ages." There are many Audreys, alas—indeed, sometimes, within a square mile even, there seems to be an epidemic of Audreys !—but a far-seeing Providence has created many Touchstones. So we will believe that in the eyes of at



Greek or Graeco-Roman Portrait.

least one person each woman has been considered fair : though, to be truthful, "a man may, if he were of a fearful heart, stagger in this attempt," as saith the blithe fool of Arden himself.

After all, these clowns and wenches in *As You Like It* are nearer the poetry of truth than that cynical prose of *fin-de-siècle* sentiment, of which this is an example :—

LADY (*looking at a sketch, then at the Artist*). "So :—this is your ideal woman?"

ARTIST. "It was."

LADY. "Then you have changed?"

ARTIST. "Yes. I *met* her."

As a matter of fact, men who have nothing of the ideal in them are, in the eyes of true women, as a sunless summer. These women, like Clara Middleton of "the fine-pointed brain," have a contempt for the male brain "chewing the cud in the happy pastures of unawakenedness."

Women, plain or fair, do not readily forgive. Man should remember this, when he acts upon what he considers his hereditary right to joke upon the frailties of his enslaved goddess. He is apt to think that they are absolutely reasonless in the matter of their looks, forgetful that marriage is a salve to all prenuptial display ! They do not mind back-handed compliments : they will smile at Victor Hugo when he says that woman is a perfected devil ; they have a caress in their heart for Gavarni when he whispers that one of the sweetest pleasures of a woman is to cause regret ; and they take a malicious entertainment in the declaration of a man of the world like Langrécé, that modesty in a woman is a virtue most deserving, since we men do all we can to cure her of it. But they will not forgive Montaigne himself when he affirms that there is no torture a woman would not suffer to enhance her beauty.

"Unfolded only out of the illimitable poem of Woman can come the poems of man."

Thus Walt Whitman. But he does not tell us how variously the poets scan that Poem. What would be the result of a plébiscite among civilised women themselves : if they were given by the Powers that Be the option to be beautiful, to be fascinating, or to be winsome ? The woman who believes herself predestined to be a wife and a mother will prefer the third : the born adventuress will choose the second : the least

domestic will select the first. On the other hand, it might be the other way round. Who can tell? Woman is still the Dark Continent of man. If one were to live to the age of Methuselah, and act on the principle of *nulla dies sine linea*, with every line devoted to the chronicle of woman's nature, the volume would be behindhand even on the day of publication. A copiously margined and footnoted edition would be called for immediately. Even if by that time only one woman were left, there would be prompt need of an appendix. There would also, as a matter of fact, always be a St. Bernard to grumble: "Woman is the organ of the Devil"—a Michelet to say with a smile that she is the Sunday of man—a cynic to hint that love of her might be the dawn of marriage, but that marriage with her would be the sunset of love—a poet to exclaim that she was the last priestess of the unknown.

"Feed me with metaphors," says a poet in a recent romance; "and above all with metaphors of Woman. I know none that do not make me love women more and more."

Did he know his Balzac? Somewhere in that vast repository of thoughts on men and women I recollect this: "La Mort est femme, —mariée au genre humain, et fidèle. Où est l'homme qu'elle a trompé?"

Some day a woman will compile a little volume of women's thoughts about men. These will be interesting. Men will read some of them with the same amazed pain wherewith recently ennobled peers peruse articles on the abolition of hereditary aristocracy.

Here, for example, is one:—

"The greatest merit of some men is their wife."

It was Poincelot, a man, who said this: but let a woman speak—

"Physical beauty in man has become as rare as his moral beauty has always been."

Once more:—

"It is not the weathercock that changes: it is the wind."

Since the days of Troy—or of Lilith—men have delighted in calling women weathercocks.

After all, we have been told many times that one of the principal occupations of men is to divine women: but it was a wise philosopher who added that women prefer us to say a little evil of them rather than say nothing of them at all.

Nos moutons nous attendent.

We have agreed, whether we have been to the Grafton Gallery or not, that there is no such thing as a standard of beauty. There is not even an accepted standard of beauty among those who admire the same general type. To the most favoured dreamer Ideala will still come in at least threefold guise, as those three lovely sisters of the Rushout family whom,



Three Ladies of the Rushout Family. By Andrew Plimer.

not Cosway, but, like him, one of the finest of miniaturists has preserved for our delight. There are a million villages as fair as the one in which we were born, but for us there is only one village. When we quote "Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain," we have one particular locality in our mental vision, as no doubt the poet of the *Song of Solomon* had when he sang, "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields; let us lodge

in the villages." Doubtless, too, he had one particular beloved in view, veiled behind his bardic rhapsody. Each of us has a particular Eve behind the phantom of an ideal type.

Of course there are both "villages" and "Eves" that exist only in the mind. There are dreamers who prefer either when most unsubstantial. "Ma contrée de dilection," says the Flemish novelist Eeckhoud, "n'existe pour aucun touriste, et jamais guide ou médecin ne la recommandera." Some, too, having found an Eve, will crave for her isolation from the rough usage of the common day, lest she fall from her high estate. They are not altogether foolish who can do so, and can say with a young living poet :—

"I fear lest time or toil should mar—
I fear lest passion should debase
The delicacy of thy grace.
Depart; and I will throne thee far,
Will hide thee in a halcyon place
That hath an angel populace;
And ever in dreams will find thy face,
Where all things pure and perfect are,
Smiling upon me like a star."¹

This is a temper beyond most of us, who are all hedonists by instinct, and in the bodily not the spiritual sense. Flaubert the man was not representative of us, his weaker fellows. "Je n'ai jamais pu emboîter Vénus avec Apollon," as he wrote to George Sand when she advised him to try domestic happiness or at least a little flirtation.

"But how to know beauty in woman when one sees it, that is the question," said to me a disappointed bachelor friend the other day. "If there is no absolute beauty, and if the type is so much distributed in various guises, how is a man who cares only for dark women to see the insignia of beauty in those who have red hair or yellow, and blue eyes, and are like curds and cream stained with roses in the matter of complexion?"

Alas for these uncertain ones, there is nothing for it but a steady course of gratifying and extending the Appreciative Faculties! To my querist I replied in the words of Gautier as Edgar de Meilhan: "Go straight as a bullet towards your beauty; seize her by the tip of her wing, politely but firmly, like a gendarme."

¹ *Granite Dust.* By Ronald C. Macfie.

IV

Doubtless many people visited the Grafton Gallery this summer in the hope of finding their Ideal. Their immediate emotion must have been one of cruel disappointment. In the first room there were many pictured women who had much to recommend them, but few who could boast of unusual good looks. To the fairest one might say, with the poet of "The Moonstar"—

"Lady, I thank thee for thy loveliness,
Because my lady is more lovely still."

Pure enthusiasts, chivalrous visionaries, like Mr. Prangë and his co-directors, and perhaps a few artists interested in technique rather than in the abstract question of beauty in the portraits, could always turn to page 1 of the catalogue, and read over and over that Machiavellian statement with its delightful "*possibly* more celebrated for, &c." : but the ordinary visitor could only at first wander disillusioned from canvas to canvas, and from room to room, uncertain whether to find a damaged ideal in the robust but self-conscious Flora of Palma Vecchio, or in the artificial and self-conscious court-ladies of Lely, or in the lovely and self-conscious "beauties" of Hoppner and Romney ; in the imposing but tempersome Corinna of Sir Frederick Leighton, or the green lady of Rossetti, or the blue Bianca of Mr. Watts, or the Ellen Terry of Mr. Sargent, or the winsome but ultra-modern Lady Colin Campbell of Boldini. These be shrines : many, and to spare.

Painters and the public have, at the Grafton, for once found themselves in agreement. The majority is united in the conviction that the finest types of beauty are painted by our English masters, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Lawrence, Hoppner, and Romney : in particular, at the Grafton show, by the two last named.

Yet, if this be admitted, one is apt speedily to call to remembrance Titian's neighbouring *Catarina Cornaro*, Lorenzo Lotto's *Lucretia*, or it may be, among the moderns, Mr. Shannon's *Iris*, or Boldini's serpentine beauty, or Mr. Watts's flower-sweet and flower-delicate early portrait of Mrs. Langtry.

Readers may be interested in the results of one method of test. I



G. F. Watts & R. A. Pinx

Walter & Co. Lith. Sc.

Mrs. Langtry.

enlisted a well-known amateur ; a lady who is herself an acknowledged Fair Woman ; and an eminent portrait-painter : and asked each to specify the three best portraits, everything considered,—the type, the technique, all in all. My friend the connoisseur hesitated, asked some questions, hesitated again, again qualified with several “ifs” and “considerings” and “in its own ways,” but finally declared for (a) Romney’s *Countess of Mansfield*. (b) Hoppner’s *Mrs. Michael Angelo Taylor as Miranda*. (c) Lely’s *Countess of Grammont*.

The Fair Woman’s choice was, of course, doubly interesting. I hoped it might include one portrait of a living woman at least : and was even mean enough to try to bias her. To be sure, I thought she bore a resemblance to one of the portraits in the Centre Room, but may have been mistaken. She was long in deliberating, and begged that each of the three might be named with a fellow of equal, or nearly equal, charm ; but this was an evasion of the difficult quandary towards which she had been inveigled, and could not be permitted. Her final personal choice was for (a) Zurbaran’s *Spanish Lady* ; (b) Titian’s *Catarina Cornaro* ; (c) Lely’s *Countess of Grammont*.

Now came the turn of the portrait-painter, and here, surely, the best testimony lay. But he began with Franz Hals’ *Maria Voogt Claasdr* and Holbein’s *Margaret Tudor* and Jan Vermeer’s delightful *Girl Playing the Guitar*, and before he got further I interrupted him, with the reminder that what was wanted was the pictorial type which most appealed to him as a man rather than as a craftsman, though artistic beauty and worth were to be potent factors in his judgment. After a long argument about the authenticity of each of these fine paintings, we agreed to believe in the genuineness of the Holbein, though not in the sitter’s being that sister of Henry VIII., who, as spouse of James IV. of Scotland—who lost wife, kingdom, and life at Flodden eleven years after his marriage—was grandmother of Mary Queen of Scots ; and to attribute the Franz Hals and the Jan Vermeer to—well, I won’t say whom ! At this juncture an eminent critic positively assured us that the Holbein was by one of the several brilliant French painters who worked in the manner of the great German master, that the Hals was really by Jan Anthonisz van Ravensteyn, and that not Jan Vermeer of Delft, but a somebody else of another place (both names, alas, unknown to us) painted the charming

guitar-player. We stood, trying to recover from our bewilderment, when we were joined for a moment by another equally eminent critic, who!



Girl Playing the Guitar. By Jan Vermeer of Delft.

came up with a blithe air and conjectured we were admiring that fine early Rembrandt which the catalogue gave as a Franz Hals. The next moment he had descried a fellow-enthusiast in the exciting game of hap-

hazard attributions, and we overheard him explaining how unmistakably the handiwork of Gerard Terburg was seen in the guitar-player which Mr. Bischoffsheim seemed to believe was by that Delft man, Vermeer.

After this we argued no more. My companion was morosely silent for a time ; then suddenly he began to speak about the lovely collection of miniatures and drawings, and, among these, of the Marchioness of Granby's *Lady Westmoreland* and other delightful studies. But he was held to his promise, and so at last, smiling again, he made up his mind, and gave me, as we parted, his three selections: (a) Lely's *Countess of Grammont*; (b) Luini's *Portrait of a Lady*; (c) Mr. Watts's *Mrs. Langtry*.

I was musing on these several sets of preferences, not, of course, without having noted that each of the three puzzled and reluctant judges had selected the famous *La Belle Hamilton*, of Lely, when a wild and unbalanced idea flashed into my mind. This was to drive into the same corner every art critic who was unfortunate enough to be present. The next moment I had realised my folly. No critic, taken seriously, would commit himself. Other art critics might read the report. Then there would be gibes, and unhallowed remarks. However, as there would be little likelihood of any two specialists agreeing, this collapse of my momentary project did not distress me. A diversion occurred, moreover. I saw, pursued, and waylaid a well-known literary man. I would call him a man of letters, but that phrase is one of his pet aversions, as "a literary man" is one of mine. But a courtesy is due to him for what follows: hence my complaisance !

In reply to my question he said that, frankly, he had never cared much for Fair Women in paint, and now cared less than ever ; that he knew next to nothing of pre-Victorian art or artists ; and then, in the same breath, he was good enough to specify "what are indubitably the three best things at the Grafton." They are (a) Van Somer's *Countess of Derby*; (b) *Mary Queen of Scots* (unknown painter); (c) Lawrence's *Lady Ellenborough*.

"There must be some deep reason for this," I said, when I had recovered from my surprise. "Why do you choose the comely enough but not noticeably good-looking *Countess of Derby*, or that quite certainly wrongly labelled *Queen Mary*, or Sir Thomas Lawrence's vigorously painted but not very winsome *Lady Ellenborough* ? "

“Because the Countess was a brick; Scott should have written a romance about her. Because I’ve always understood Mary was the most



The Countess of Westmoreland. By the Marchioness of Granby.

beautiful woman of her time, and I’m not going back upon that *now*, seeing that my faith survived the Mary Exhibition ordeal. Thirdly, because Lady Ellenborough was a ‘caution,’ and cautions o’ that ilk have had

an irresistible fascination for me ever since the governess whom I adored in my early boyhood ran off to sea disguised as an apprentice, married a Unitarian parson in the States, and died, very much a caution, after an adventurous and kaleidoscopic career, the owner of the chief gambling saloon in San Francisco."

This was interesting, but it was not art criticism. I turned despondently away, humming to myself the quatrain from the old north-country nursery-ballad of "Rashin Coatie"—

"There was a king and a queen,
As mony ane's been;
Few have we seen,
As few may we see."

Alas! there were so many queens of beauty on the walls, and yet my heart was not lost to one of them! Then I remembered a favourite couplet, by Campion,

"Beauty must be scorned in none
Though but truly served in one"—

and, having thought of and quoted that sweet singer found I had to go right through three stanzas of his, memorable even in the ever-new wealth of Elizabethan love-songs.

"Give beauty all her right!
She's not to one form tied;
Each shape yields fair delight,
Where her perfections bide:
Helen, I grant, might pleasing be,
And Ros'mond was as sweet as she.

"Some the quick eye commends,
Some swelling lips and red;
Pale looks have many friends,
Through sacred sweetness bred:
Meadows have flowers that pleasures move,
Though roses are the flowers of love.

"Free beauty is not bound
To one unmov'd clime;
She visits every ground,
And favours every time.
Let the old lords with mine compare;
My Sovereign is as sweet and fair."

There: all that is to be said about Fair Women, or the Beauty of Woman, is compressed into six short lines. This intangible beauty is

citizen of the world, and has her home in Cathay as well as Europe, no one age claims her, and Helen of Troy takes hands with Aspasia, and they smile across the years to Lucrezia Borgia and Diane de Poitiers, who, looking forward, see the lovely light reflected in la belle Hamilton, and so down to our own day. And then, once more, Eve individualised for ever and ever; a challenge to all the world to bring forward one sweeter and fairer than "my Sovereign."

Probably, I thought, since judges so representative as the amateur, the Fair Woman, and the portrait-painter agree in the selection of the Countess of Grammont, there will be discernible in Lely's finest picture a fundamental charm that will appeal to every one. That charm, no doubt, will be distinction. With the Egoist, "my thoughts come to this conclusion, that, especially in women, distinction is the thing to be aimed at."

The familiar canvas was in delightful company. Her sisters-in-Lely were there; the Princess Mary, afterwards Queen Mary II., as Diana; the winsome Diana Kirke, the second wife of Aubrey de Vere, twentieth and last Earl of Oxford, a Fair Woman whom personally I much preferred to her famous rival; Nell Gwynne, the bonnie free-lance; the charming but not rigorously virtuous Mrs. Jane Middleton, whose relative, John Evelyn, has chronicled her "famous, and indeed incomparable beauty," and some of whose doings are set forth in Anthony Hamilton's celebrated *Grammont Memoirs*; and the Lady Barbara Grandison, who married the Earl of Castlemaine, found favour in the eyes of Charles II. (who created her Duchess of Cleveland), and was daring enough to wed once more a commoner, though, to be sure, he was the fashionable Adonis of his day, "Beau" Fielding. Besides, there were Hogarth's portrait of the Marchioness of Granby, with which it would have been interesting to compare Mr. Shannon's of the Fair Woman who at present bears that title—his best portrait, many of his admirers think, and certainly one that would have better suited the Grafton Gallery than his *Iris*, charming portrait-picture though that be—the Duchesse de Croy of Van Dyck, and the noble Anne of Austria, by Rubens.

Every one knows *La Belle Hamilton*, the finest of the Hampton Court beauties. In common with *Nell Gwynne* and the *Duchess of Cleveland* this masterpiece of Lely's belongs to the Queen. I wonder how the



The Countess of Grammont. By Sir Peter Lely.

gossipy Anthony Hamilton would have moralised if he had been able to foresee this whim of Destiny. The three ladies themselves might



Diana Kirke, Countess of Oxford. By Sir Peter Lely.

have been more surprised still, if their thoughts could cross the gulf that separates the Stuart Court from the Victorian. Some readers will recall the saying, "*The Count de Grammont's short memory!*" When that

courtier left England he was followed and confronted by the brothers of “la belle Hamilton,” who, with drawn swords, asked him if he had not forgotten something. “True, true,” replied the Count : who forthwith retraced his steps and, as a chronicler has it, “repaired the lapse by making the young lady Countess of Grammont.” As a painting, this superb work is not only the highest achievement of Lely, but touches the high-water level of Lely’s prototype, Van Dyck. Even the finest of the adjacent canvases of the great Sir Anthony, the *Duchesse de Croy*, and in particular *Dorothy Sidney*, do not surpass this beautiful picture.

But while it is easy to understand how Elizabeth Hamilton became “la belle Hamilton” at the Court of Charles II., and had more offers of marriage than the number of years she had lived, till, in the third year of the Restoration, she gave her hand to the celebrated wit and courtier, the Comte Philiberte de Grammont, most of us doubtless would find it difficult to discover that “fundamental charm” we hoped to find. I could believe all that her brother Anthony could tell of her beauty and winsomeness, and have no doubt that Count Philibert was a very lucky man ; but, for myself, I realised that even had I been a member of that wicked, laughing, delightful, reprehensible Carolan Court, and a favourite of fortune in the matter of advantages, I doubt if I would have been one of the five-and-twenty suitors of “la belle Hamilton ;” certainly, as things are, one might be Japhet in search of a wife and still not be allured, even in random fancy, by this particular Fair Woman.¹ Alas, there is yet another charm which allures men when Beauty is only an impossible star ; in the words of the anonymous poet of “Tibbie Fowler o’ the Glen,”

“Gin a lass be e’er sae black,
An’ she hae the pennysiller,
Set her up on Tinto tap,
The win’ll blaw a man ’till her.”

It was not the fair Elizabeth’s “pennysiller,” however, that was the attraction, though she did have what the Scots slyly call “advantages.”

Nevertheless, it is clear she must have in her beauty something that appeals to many minds and in different epochs. The fastidious nobles and wits of the Restoration admired her ; Sir Peter Lely expended his highest powers in painting her ; his portrait of her has long been the

¹ Marryat’s Japhet sought a father, but this is not a misapplication to boggle at !

gem of the famous series known as the "Windsor Beauties," and at Hampton Court she is ever one of the most popular of the ladies of the Stuart *régime*.

Probably the Countess of Sunderland, of whom Van Dyck, it is thought, so much enjoyed the painting, must have been more winsome in looks, as she was certainly superior in graces of mind and spirit. This is the famous Lady Dorothy Sidney, daughter of the second Earl of Leicester and wife of that Lord Sunderland, the first of his title, who fell fighting under the Royalist flag at the Battle of Newbury; not to be remembered for this now, however, but as the "Sacharissa" of Edmund Waller's love-poems. True, Waller, who was for generations one of the most popular, and for a few decades *the* most popular of all English poets, is now almost as little read as the least notable of his contemporaries. He aspired to be England's Petrarch, and like Lovelace with one flawless lyric, or like Blanco White, or the French poet, Félix Arvers, with a single sonnet, is now among the immortals by virtue only of one little song. Possibly Laura had as good reason for discounting the passion of her Petrarco as Dorothy Sidney had for qualification of the prolonged homage of Waller. Both "My deathless Laura" and "My divine Sacharissa" married another person than the lover who gave immortality in verse; married, and had children, and occasionally perhaps glanced at the Sonnets to Laura, or the Poems addressed to Sacharissa. Not only, indeed, did Lady Dorothy choose Lord Sunderland in preference to Waller, but as a widow she even preferred the practical poetry of a Mr. Robert Smythe's wooing to that which in her youth she had had so much experience of in verse. Fair and comely she seems in Van Dyck's portrait of her, though not the Sacharissa of whom one had dreamed. Was it this attractive English lady who was the inspirer of "Go, lovely Rose"? The thought suggests what a strange revelation it would be if we were to be entertained with a series of authentic likenesses of all the beautiful women we have loved or dreamed of across the ages. "A Dream of Fair Women"; what would Helen say to it, or Cleopatra, or Guenevere, or, for that matter, Eve herself? What a desert of disillusion would exist between the catalogue-entry, "Helen, daughter of Leda queen to King Tyndarus, who became the wife of Menelaus, and subsequently went abroad with

Paris : commonly known as *Helen of Troy*," and the quoted motto-lines from Marlowe :—

"Is this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burned the topless towers of Ilium?"

Again, fancy the astonishment and chagrin of Mr. Swinburne, if he passed one by one the actual counterparts of the ladies of the "*Masque of Queen Bersabe*," from *Herodias* to that *Alaciél* whose eyes "were as a grey-green sea," and found that he could not recognise one of those vignettes in red or white flame which he wrought so wondrously in the days of his youth ! *Semiramis*, in truth, may have been but a handsome woman with a temper, the *Queen of Sheba* nothing more than distinctly pretty, and *Sappho* passionate but plain.

But there is a difference between the praisers of Royal beauty and those who hymn ladies whom they can also approach when the lyre is laid aside. We believe in *Laura* and *Sacharissa* and *Castara*, and many other fair dames beloved of the sons of *Apollo*. If for nothing else than because she inspired the loveliest of all *Waller's* songs, we would look with homage at this Fair Woman whom the genius of *Vandyck* has given us a glimpse of :—

"Go, lovely Rose,
Tell her that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows
When I resemble her to thee
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

"Tell her that's young,
And shuns to have her graces spied,
That hadst thou sprung
In deserts where no men abide,
Thou must have uncommended died.

"Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired ;
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be desired,
And not blush so to be admired.

"Then die, that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee,
How small a part of time they share
Who are so wondrous sweet and fair."

V

Having done with the fair Sunderland and her rival, La Belle Hamilton, I studied one by one the other pictures selected by my friends. Who could not admire the Zurbaran, masterly as a Velasquez? and Titian's *Catarina* is admitted by all to be worthy of her fame. The Luini, a fine example of mysterious haunting beauty of expression, will appeal to all who love the type of which the rarest presentment has been given to us by Leonardo. Of the more modern works, Romney's *Louisa Cathcart* is likely enough first to win the wandering fancy. Sweet she is, and gracious, and lovely in her young dignity of wifehood, this bonnie Lady Mansfield. But there is beauty, too, rare and convincing beauty, in Hoppner's *Miranda*. Who was "Miranda"? All that the catalogue tells is that she was the wife of Michael Angelo Taylor, M.P. Michael Angelo, it may be added, was a member of Boodle's. That alone meant social distinction. But he was also an intimate acquaintance of the Prince Regent. On a memorable night in 1811, on the occasion of the drafting out the reply to the Address of the Houses of Parliament, George P.R. was kindly put to bed by his solicitous companions, and Michael Angelo wrote out the Princely response, while Sheridan and William Adam "paced opposite sides of the room till each could find an opportunity of whispering to Michael that the other was the damndest rogue existing." As for Mrs. Michael, she was *persona gratissima* at Carlton House, where the Prince, half drunk or half sober, radiated the Glory of the World. She might have been a sister of Mrs. Jane Middleton or of Nell Gwynne, rather than that Miranda whom Shakespere drew in rainbow-gold and touched with immortality. But even as an impossible Miranda she is well worthy the homage of admiration. As a painting, this is one of Hoppner's triumphs. Its beauty, its grace, its freedom, its charm, are unmistakable. Here, and in at least a score of other canvases on the line of his ablest achievement, he proves what a high place in English art is his due, a long deferred and even now not often frankly granted due.

There still remained the strange selections of Fair Women, on the part of my literary counsellor. One of these is certainly not without

attraction, and probably the lady whom Van Somer painted was more than merely comely. She has fine eyes, and there is a look upon her face as though the best light of beauty, that of happiness, was often seen there. A brave dame this Lady Derby was ; a "brick," as my friend called her. She is sometimes spoken of as a type of the heroic woman, an aristocratic Grace Darling, an English Kate Barlas ;¹ but honour to whom honour is due, and so let it be remembered that the wife of the seventh Lord Derby, who was so famous for her heroic defence of Latham House against Fairfax and his Parliamentarians, was a Frenchwoman, Charlotte de la Tremouille by name. Neither disaster nor the death of her nearest and dearest quelled her indomitable spirit. She could not prevent the execution of her husband, but she could maintain his loyalty in death and his loyalty in life to the king. The Parliamentary chiefs were anxious to make her a prisoner, either for exile or restraint ; but she was in her own lands, and no man durst betray her. In time she made good her escape to the Isle of Man ; and it must have been a consolation to her pride that she was the last person who submitted formally to the authority of the Parliament. It is pleasant to know that so staunch a Royalist not only escaped the enmity of her foes during the period of the Commonwealth, but lived to see the Restoration, and to have a message of gracious courtesy from the King, who had come "intill his ain" again.

But at the Queen Mary I admit I looked unmoved. It is not a genuine "Mary," in the first place ; as to that there can hardly be any question. But over and above this, it is doubtful if there is a portrait of the Queen of Scots in existence which any Mariolater could have pleasure in looking at. There are certain women we never wish to see except in mental vision. Some readers may recollect that Sapphic fragment preserved by Hephaestion which tells us simply that "Mnasidica is more shapely than the tender Gyrinno." Fortunate Mnasidica, who has haunted the minds of men ever since, not once enslaved by sculptor or painter of any period ! Beautiful Shapeliness, that none can gainsay ! Painters who give us Helens and Cleopatras and Queen Maries seem quite unaware of the

¹Catherine Douglas, who, for her heroic attempt to save James I. of Scotland by barring the door of the royal chamber with her naked arm, received the sobriquet of "Kate Barlass." This is the origin, it is said, of the Scottish surname "Barlas." Kate Barlas is immortalised in literature in *The King's Tragedy*.

heavy handicap they put upon their productions. And so it goes without saying that all portraits of Mary of Scotland are disappointing, from that of the earliest anonymous limner to that of Mr. Lavery. There is not one of us *blasé* enough to withstand the cruel disillusion of what, by way of adding insult to injury, is called an authentic likeness. Poor Mary ! She has paid bitterly in innumerable portraits for the wonderful rumour of her beauty in her own day. No man who respects himself should commit *lèse majesté* by staring and commenting upon this much pictorially misrepresented Queen. It does indeed make one glad that a few other young ladies famous for their beauty were spared the ignominy of pictorial immortality !

As for Lady Ellenborough, surely it must be admitted that even the art of Sir Thomas Lawrence does not bestow beauty upon her. Doubtless she had a smile that would unlock prison doors, eyes that would melt a Marat or a Danton, a mien and manner, an expression and charm, that made her irresistible to most men. But, on canvas, one can see no more than that she looks like a woman who had immense vitality. Otherwise, I sympathise with my friend. The lady's story is certainly a remarkable one. Miss Jane Elizabeth Digby must have been a vivacious damsel, even while still a school-girl and learning, in the manner of her time, to spell execrably. She was one of the fortunate women born with the invisible sceptre. If she had been an actress she would have been the empress of the stage : if she had been a demi-mondaine she would have been the Aspasia of her day : if she had been a queen, she would have been a Catherine of Russia. Again, she was one of those impetuous people who have no time to be virtuous. We know next to nothing of her girlhood, yet we may be sure that she set her nursemaid a bad example in flirtation, and shocked her governess, if she had one, by many abortive intrigues. No doubt her friends thought that she would settle down and be good when she became the wife of the Earl of Ellenborough. They argued that what a high-spirited Miss Digby would do, a proud-spirited Countess of Ellenborough would disdain. But Miss Jane Elizabeth had, she considered, come into the world to enjoy herself in her own way. Not long after her marriage she permitted the too marked attention of Prince Schwartzemberg, and this brought about a duel between that gentleman and Lord Ellenborough. Neither duellist was killed : and the

only result was that not long afterwards the lady made up her mind to go off with Prince Schwarzenberg. After a time Lord Ellenborough died, and then his widow married the Prime Minister of Bavaria. That a genuine passion for this strange woman animated the Bavarian noble is clear not only from his having offered marriage to a lady of such doubtful reputation, but from the tragic circumstance that, when she tired of him in turn, and set forth once more on her dauntless quest of man, he committed suicide. She had several episodes between this date and that when she found herself in Syria, and espoused to an Arab Sheik of Damascus. It would be incredible that she died in his arms in the desert, were it not for the additional fact that she was at that moment contemplating an elopement with her handsome dragoman. Miss Digby was, certainly, not one of those "beauties" towards whom—as Gautier advises a man, in a sentence already given here—one should go straight as a bullet. Instead of our seizing "her by the tip of her wing, politely but firmly like a gendarme," she would be much more likely to seize us. She was unreasonable, we will admit, but then, with Mme. de Girardin, she might exclaim "Be reasonable ! which means : No longer hope to be happy." Obviously she was of those essentially feline women of whom Edgar de Meilhan speaks when he says that "tigers, whatever you may say, are bad companions." "With regard to tigers," he adds, "we tolerate only cats, and then they must have velvet paws." Neither Lord Ellenborough, nor the Bavarian Prime Minister, nor the Arab Sheik, nor any other of her special friends, would deny that a little more velvet on the paws of the sprightly Jane Elizabeth would have been an advantage.

There are always women of this kind, who exercise an imperious and inexplicable sway over the male imagination, or, to be more exact, over the imagination of certain males. It is no use to reason with the bondager. With the King in *Love's Labour's Lost* he can but reply

"Yet still she is the moon, and I the man.
The music plays"

We are fortunate, no doubt, who never hear this music, a bewildering strain from the heart of the Venusberg. Rather that "silver chiming," which is "the music of the bells of wedded love." Poets are terrible romanticists in the matter of the affections. They are the most faithful

of lovers to some fair impossible She: but they are apt to have wandering eyes in the ordinary way of life. Too many behave, even on the threshold of the Ideal, in the reprehensible manner of Samuel Pepys when that famous chronicler and incurable old pagan found himself in church one fine day. "Being wearied," he writes, "turned into St. Dunstan's Church, where I heard an able sermon of the minister of the place; and stood by a pretty modest maid, whom I did labour to take by the hand; but she would not, but got further and further from me; and, at last, I could perceive her to take pins out of her pocket to prick me if I should touch her again—which, seeing, I did forbear, and was glad I did spy her design. And then I fell to gaze upon another pretty maid in a pew close to me, and she on me; and I did go about to take her by the hand, which she suffered a little and then withdrew. So the sermon ended." It is to be feared that Pepys had not realised the very common truth, which may be given in the guise of a remembered phrase from *Evan Harrington*,—"Both Ale and Eve seem to speak imperiously to the love of man. See that they be good, see that they come in season."

If all the Fair Women of Picture-World were to be brought together it would be made quite clear that the one thing that in a thousand instances escapes the painter is expression. Expression is the morning-glory of beauty. A few men in all ages have understood this, Leonardo and the great Italians preeminently. It is to the credit of many of the most eccentric "impressionists" that they have wearied of conventional similitude, and striven to give something of the real self of the person whose likeness is being transferred to canvas. These, with Bastien Lepage, have realised that "we must change our ways if any of our work is to live." "We must try," adds that notable artist of whom Mrs. Julia Cartwright has recently given us so excellent a biography, "We must try to see and reproduce that inmost radiance which lies at the heart of things, and is the only true beauty, because it is the life."

That inmost radiance! To discern it, to apprehend it, to reveal it to others, that is indeed the quintessential thing in all art.

But the spectator must not only make allowances for the painter of a portrait; he must himself exercise a certain effort. In a word, he must bring the glow of imagination into play, he must let his mental

atmosphere be nimble and keenly receptive. He must remember that while portraiture may have verisimilitude of a kind, it can very rarely simulate that loveliest thing in a woman's beauty—expression. He must discern in the canvas a light that is not there. He must see the colour come and go upon the face, must see the eyes darken or gleam, the lips move, the smile just about to come forth, and if possible the inner radiance that in many vivid and fine natures seems to dwell upon the forehead, though too fugitive ever to be caught, save as it were for a moment unawares.

PART II

“Ce fut un beau souper, ruisselant de surprises.”

—THÉODORE DE BANVILLE : *Odes Funambulesques*.

I

I DO NOT know how it was, but after the clock had struck six at the Grafton Gallery on the day of the private view, I found myself there still, in deserted rooms. The last private-viewer had gone ; the directors and secretaries and assistants and collaborators had shaken hands and departed rejoicing ; even the hall porter, after having locked and bolted the front door, had disappeared.

I cannot say how long I brooded over this unexpected derangement of my plans, but presumably for some time ; for all at once I became aware that the rooms were dark, and that I was alone without any knowledge of where the electric light could be turned on, if electric light there were ; alone, without even a match.

The situation to some extent resembled that of Don Juan when he found himself in the Sultan's harem at Stamboul. But then, though I too was surrounded by a superfluity of Fair Women, there was a marked distinction. Besides, even if the ladies were alive, or if any one could come to life at the touch of a mortal hand, it was profoundly dark, and I might touch the wrong person. On canvas I had much admired the technical presentment of certain dames with whom, however, it would be no pleasure to have a further acquaintanceship. Maria Voogt Claasdr, for example, or Cornelis Janssen's fair Hollander.

I was uncertain even in what room I stood : but, strange to say, was conscious of the fact that the portraits had become actualised, were alive. Had I realised that I was in the Centre Room I might have found my way to a friendly picture with whom (it would be rude to say “which”) I might have had some interesting conversation. But I think I dreaded

Maria Voogt Claasdr, or Queen Elizabeth as "Diana," or even the fair but too impulsive Jane Elizabeth Digby.



Queen Elizabeth as Diana. By Vroom Cornelius.

All perplexity, however, was speedily solved. In a moment there was a brilliant illumination. Obviously this was no kindly consideration

on the part of the returned porter, for the glow was entirely diffused from the light in innumerable beautiful eyes, and from the gleam of jewels upon white arms and breasts. I saw then, to my bewilderment, that I was not in the Octagon Room, but in the Centre Gallery. It was with only vague curiosity, however, I noted the great enlargement of this room, both in width and length. All the *bric-à-brac* cases had been removed, and a small company of ladies was moving to and fro, chatting and laughing.

There was no mistaking H.M. the Queen, as Von Angeli had painted her. I made an obeisance, and again to the beautiful, wistful-eyed Princess Alix, but was less ready with a lady who at that moment stepped down from frame No. 103. As she seemed somewhat perturbed at my not at once bowing low before her, I looked to see who she was, and discovered her an early Richmond, and no other than the future Queen of England. "I had always thought the Princess beautiful as well as distinguished," I murmured to myself in excuse.

At first it looked as though all the ladies in the room had come down from their frames; but soon I saw this was not so, and that I was assisting at a gathering of modern paintings only. With a start of surprise I noticed there were a few gentlemen present, among whom were Sir Frederick Leighton and several of his *confrères*, including M. Boldini from Paris; though this was nothing compared with my astonishment when I became aware of the charming unconventionality that prevailed. Every lady appeared exactly as she was painted, and no one seemed astonished at any informality. In fact, there was no embarrassment even among the gentlemen, except in three instances. Mr. Calderon looked confused and very uneasy when Aphrodite advanced towards him laughingly, and begged him to run and fetch a towel, as she was still dripping from her delightful dip in the Ionian sea. Mr. Poynter distinctly flushed when, hearing some one calling to him, he glanced round, and perceived the pretty young girl, clothed only with a fan, whom he had painted as *High Noon*. She had perched herself on the top of a heavy frame, in lieu of the rocks whence she indolently crawled. As for the President, I noted that he avoided the corner where the lady of the Frigidarium stood calmly inspecting her reflection in the bath-water; indeed, he did not at any time seem anxious to meet even his beautiful



Princess Alix of Hesse. By F. A. Kaulbach.

Corinna of Tanagra. Probably they had had some slight disagreement in the studio concerning the length of her eyelashes or certain details of her dress.



H.R.H. The Princess of Wales. By W. B. Richmond, A.R.A.

However, I understood how one might prefer new acquaintances. There were several ladies whom I had met before, but towards whom my ardour had cooled. So far back as twelve years ago I remembered having

almost fallen in love with a Fair Woman introduced to public notice by Rossetti under the name of *Veronica Veronese*. Years had passed since I had looked into an art-record of which in my youth I had been guilty; but in a flash I recollected my crude rhapsodisings. There Veronica was, however, seated near her frame, and listening to her canary. How I remember that fowl! Did I not write of it, *more Scoticè*, "The latter is a pure yellow canary"; and did not an amused critic demand what right I had to cast any imputation upon the morality of canaries in general by this obtrusive insistence on the purity of the Rossettian bird?

I looked at her, now, from a changed standpoint. There could be no question but that, for myself at least, I had overrated her artistic charm, though that she has charm as well as beauty is not to be gainsaid. Overcoming my shyness I went up to her. After a brief conversation wherein Veronica remarked that she feared there was only one critic left who would wax enthusiastic about her charms, and even his eloquence was no longer as burning as it was, notwithstanding unremitting practice in a leading periodical, I asked her who Girolama Ridolfi was, and where one could procure the *Lettres* whence came the extract which Rossetti had placed on the lower part of her frame.

For a moment she smiled, and the pure yellow canary stopped its incessant living-up to its designation of *l'oiseau inspirateur*.

"Girolama Ridolfi," she said, "was a young man who lived in the same haunted house as Chiaro dell' Erma, Chiaro of *Hand and Soul*, you remember? His *Lettres* would, I am afraid, be as difficult to find as that triptych in Dresden or that picture in the Pitti palace of which my father-in-art gave so fascinating an account."

I was the more interested in this confirmation of my suspicion, as that very day I had been snubbed by a fellow art-critic who, on my asking him as we stood before Veronica Veronese who Ridolfi was, had replied with mingled surprise at my ignorance and in easy surety of knowledge—"Oh, Ridolfi? Why *the* famous Girolama Ridolfi, of course, who wrote the *Lettres*, you know."¹

It was with pleasure I turned to the bright and winsome Lavinia,

¹ As I have seen the French quotation in question attributed seriously to "the mediæval writer Ridolfi," I may as well say definitely here that Rossetti himself told me he had written these imaginary words of the imaginary Ridolfi.



Veronica Veronese. By D. G. Rossetti.

who had strolled from beneath the warm lights and shadows of the tree where G. D. Leslie had seen and painted her. It may be a bourgeois taste, but I admit that I preferred this wholesome, sunny, sweet-natured young Englishwoman to her more æsthetic neighbour with the canary. Glancing back at the canvas itself, it seemed to me one of the best open-air pictures that Leslie ever painted, and to show the thorough skill and knowledge of that fine English artist whom it has long been the fashion to depreciate.¹ If Lavinia was as gentle in voice and manner as her smiles and expression would naturally indicate, there was a contrast at hand in the person of a very pretty but rather pettish girl who stood biting a long wisp of hair which she had snatched from her tangled wavy locks. I remembered a drawing by Mr. Frederick Sandys called *Proud Maisie*, and it was easy to recognise the original. I did not speak, however; and also passed, without more than a bow, a lady of great fame both in the Ancient and the Modern world. In truth I had at home a Shakesperian portrait of "Egypt" that was far preferable to the Hebraically handsome personage whom I overheard complaining to her beautiful and stately neighbour, Corinna of Tanagra, that she wished either Mr. Alma Tadema or Sir Henry Thompson would remove the offensive *Op. cxlvi.*, which is painted on her canvas. "I am not a piece of music," added Cleopatra, "nor do I care to be labelled as though I were the hundred and forty-sixth work for sale."

It was a gratification to meet Corinna. In the first place, her beauty is remarkable, and of a rare type. Then rumour has declared for centuries that she was not less distinguished as a poetess than celebrated for her loveliness. Psappha the Lesbian, Erinna of Telos, Corinna of Tanagra! Three songsweet names, with magic in them still. To meet the rival of Pindar was no small honour, but I admit that I would have rejoiced in her beauty had she been "nobody." The opportunity for settling one or two matters was too good to be lost. Hence, after a tribute of homage which it was impossible to resist paying, I asked her whether she really came from Tanagra, or from Thebes as some have asserted.

"There was no question of the kind in my day," she replied coldly.

¹ The reader interested in the subject will find the best account of Leslie and his art in the essay by Mr. P. G. Hamerton in *Thoughts about Art*.



Lavinia. By G. D. Leslie, R.A.

"Every one knew that Corinna was called Corinna of Tanagra. Possibly some too appreciative historian in Thebes has claimed me as a citizen?"

"Just so: as to this day enthusiasts dispute concerning the birth-place of Homer, the character and importance and number of writings of Sappho, and other matters of extreme interest to all lovers of ancient literature. You will forgive the adjective, Corinna, but you know that in our hurried age we apply the term 'ancient' somewhat loosely."

"Do not disturb yourself, I pray. From all I have seen and heard I have no wish to be other than antique. But now you must forgive me. I wish to speak to a lady who is also, I understand, a daughter of the Muses, or at any rate is one who has earned repute by her pen. Her father-in-art, M. Boldini, has just informed me that I must meet my only possible rival."

"Ah, you mean——"

"Yes, that lady in black. I thought at first she was Lamia. She has a serpentine grace that charms me when she moves to and fro, but I must say that when she sits in the manner in which M. Boldini has painted her I am perplexed. Women of old stood when they stood, and sat when they sat: but this Fair Woman—to use your phrase, though I note that her type of beauty is dark, as it was in my own time—seems, as she reclines, to dispose very uncomfortably of what I believe it is the vogue now to allude to as the lower limbs. Will you introduce me to her?"

"I will introduce her to you with pleasure, Corinna, if you will only be good enough to answer one or two little questions which I may not again have an opportunity to ask. Now, about Pindar——"

"Excuse me, we who are only visitors to the Old Country cannot discuss others who like ourselves are no longer residents here."

"Tell me, at least, whether Aelian is right in his statement that you won the bardic victory over Pindar no fewer than five times, or is Pausanias correct in his declaration that you contested only once with that famous Doric poet?"

Corinna looked at me somewhat disdainfully.

"I have heard about this Pausanias. He averred that I strove only once with my pupil Pindar, and that my victory was due to my beauty

which biassed the judges, and also to the fact that my lyric verse was chanted in the Æolic, and so was better understood of my auditory than Pindar with his unquestionably very beautiful Doric measures. Well let me assure you that Pausanias was wrong. I excelled by virtue of the merit of my verse. I would scorn to succeed because of the accident of good looks."

"That, Corinna, has been said by every beautiful woman who has come into the world——"

"You do not believe me?"

"Do not speak so coldly, beautiful Corinna. I ask you to turn and look at the canvas you have just left. Is not the phantom of you that Sir Frederick has fixed there enough to dissuade the judgment of poor weak men? There are many fair women here at this moment, and some whose moral worth is superlative, yet what man could refuse to award to you the——"

"One moment. Would *you* give me the palm of beauty over, say, the serpentine lady, over your *fin-de-siècle* Lamia, of whom M. Boldini is the father-in-art?"

It was awkward, for at this moment M. Boldini and Lady Colin Campbell came close to us. There are times when the bravest of men is a coward. I am not the bravest of men, and I had not even a temptation to be honest at all cost. Like George Washington, I had no hesitation about a lie. It was not for nothing I had been in the habit of visiting the studios of popular painters. With ready tact I changed the subject.

"Ah, you must meet each other! The Antique and the Modern World! Serpentina, you must allow me to introduce you to the celebrated Corinna of Tanagra, the instructor and rival and master of Pindar, the author of five volumes of imperishable verse,¹ and the most beautiful woman of that wonderful fifth century before our Christian era. Corinna, permit me to——"

At that moment, unfortunately, M. Boldini seized me by the arm. When I released myself, the two fair women were already in animated conver-

¹ A polite fiction: the five volumes once existed, it is true, but were irretrievably lost, probably more than 2000 years ago. Only a few authentic fragments of the writings of this famous poetess have been preserved.

sation, the one tall and as dignified as the Venus of Milo, the other no longer with her garments so twisted about her as to suggest that she had girt herself for a dance, but now a fitting rival to her companion.

There was nothing for it but to resign myself to my new interlocutor.

"Heavens ! my friend," he exclaimed, "what do these painters of yours, Rossetti, Watts, Burne Jones, mean ? They seem to me to paint portraits of portraits, not of living women. There is no inside. Each of these æsthetic and academical women I have seen here and at the Academy is as manufactured as dear old Villiers' Hadaly. You remember her, the automatic heroine of *L'Ève Future* ?¹ Look at this *Circe* of your Sir Edward. Has he ever seen sails at sea that he has painted them in this impossible fashion ?"

I was thankful that he spoke in a low voice ; also that he did not understand English. For just behind us were Mr. Watts and the painter of *Circe*, and they were discussing the strange mental condition of those French impressionists who, because of a brilliant cleverness of a mechanical kind, believe that they and they alone possess the secret of true Art.

"They are the talented journalists of Art, not her poets, her sages," said the one.

"They are Society-paper paragraphists who wish to be thought Thackeray," remarked the other.

"Which is the truth, President ?" some one asked at that moment of the well-known personage who strolled by, with a nod for every one.

"The truth ? In Art all is truth that is truthful. This is a profound thought. At Burlington House there are many mansions. We have had deceased British artists who in the flesh would not speak to each other. Some winter—far off I hope—there will be a Watts Exhibition, also I need hardly say, a Burne-Jones Exhibition. Ah ! my dear Sir John we were just saying that the Millais Exhibition, which must one winter—far remote I trust—be the chief attraction at Burlington House—ah, you here, Monsieur Boldini ! This is an unexpected pleasure. But a second

¹ *L'Ève Future*, by Villiers de l'Isle Adam ; a remarkable romance based on the actual and imagined electrical inventions of Mr. Edison, with a beautiful automatic woman as heroine.

ago we were saying that the presence among us of men like yourself is not only most welcome but is an added stimulus to emulation ——”

At that moment the parroquet which was perching on the shoulder of a young lady who had passed from a frame labelled *Love Birds* flew to the



Sara Bernhardt.

graceful and lovely *Iris*, whom I remembered having met in Mr. Shannon's studio. The incident, trivial as it was, distracted my attention. *Iris*, I thought, looked tired and bored; in fact, she admitted, in a whisper, that this was the case.

“Why should Mr. Shannon send me here?” she added, “though perhaps it is not his doing after all. He must know that some of my easel-sisters would care more for this kind of thing, and certainly be much

more appreciated. The Marchioness of Granby—of course you remember her at the Grosvenor some years ago—*she* ought to be here : and, by the way, you must look at her lovely little drawings ”—

I am afraid I heard no more, if any more were said—which is unlikely, as Iris was already in a reverie, a dream as white and lovely as her own white and lovely self. For just then I was dazzled by the sheen and glitter of Miss Ellen Terry's gorgeous Lady Macbeth apparel. She came forward arm in arm with Mme. Sara Bernhardt, laughing consumedly, much more in the manner of Rosalind than of the grim spouse of the Thane of Cawdor.

“Oh, have you seen my father-in-art, Mr. Sargent? No? I do so want to get hold of him. He has always said that some dreadful malformation underlay that glove on Miss Grant's right arm and hand ; and now she is about to reveal the mystery ! You know Miss Grant, don't you ? You must have met her at Prof. Herkomer's ? Well, she is tired to death, she says, of the critics who will draw attention to what she admits to be a shortcoming, but is nothing so very dreadful after all ; and now that Prof. Herkomer is busy at Bushey she is going to take the opportunity of settling the matter. Do you see that robust brunette ? She is a Daughter of the Lagoon, whom Mr. Luke Fildes brought over with him from Venice. I admire the way in which these two Fair Women stick by each other. Each is such an admirable foil to the other. Ah, there is Veronica Veronese's canary ! Catch it ! catch it ! ”

But at this the spell came to an end. The lovely glow waned ; the figures became confused ; there was even, it appeared to me, an unseemly scramble in front of a score or so of frames. The swish of a long serpentine black dress came right across my eyes, as I staggered against the dissolving shadow of M. Boldini. Then all was darkness, and I knew no more.

II

When I opened my eyes again I had no idea where I was. What an absurd dream, was my first thought, on recollecting all that has just been described. The dream, however, was soon forgotten in the bewilderment of a more immediate problem.

No one who has slept in the uncomfortable grandeur of an Italian palace will fail to understand me when I say that I felt convinced I had awaked in Italy. Any one who has slept in a palace of this kind, and opened his eyes for the first time to a Venetian morning, will understand me when I say I knew at once that I was in Venice.

That rippling sound, more like the stealthy feel of a sleeper's slow-moving hand than the motion of water, was unmistakable ; or, if there were room for doubt, there could be no mistake when *Stalì !* and *Premè !* those familiar gondolier-cries, were heard.

Then it was as though dark veils were suddenly withdrawn. The inrush of sudden sunlight would no doubt have dazzled me, but, as it happened, I was not in Venice after all ; and the forenoon light of London, however much it may cheer gas companies and electricians, could never be alluded to as bewildering.

And yet, where was I ? At the time, certainly, I believed myself to be in that loveliest of all cities of the world. Though the apartment before me was a glorified duplicate of the octagon room at the Grafton Gallery, the palace that contained the room was in Venice, and among the company I could see many beautiful women of the great days of Italy, and with them famous painters whom it was easy to recognise as Titian, Paris Bordone, Giovanni Pordenone, Jacopo Palma, Il Bacchiacca, Bernardino Luini, Sandro Botticelli, and others of Venice, Milan, Florence, and elsewhere.

By far the most beautiful woman in the room came slowly forward. I saw that she glanced at every man with a curious, wistful gaze. Surely. I thought, such beauty should be recognisable ; but I could not recall the features, though they were unmistakably of the finest Venetian type, Certainly, she had no counterpart among the portraits on the walls.

But before she reached me she turned aside to return the greetings of Titian and his friend Sansovino, "the courteous and gentle." Instead, there came forward a handsome man and woman, whom I recognised from a set of portraits of Italian celebrities of the sixteenth century which I possess. They were Varchi, the Florentine poet and an exile, and Lucrezia Gonzaga, the illustrious pupil of Bandella and Pico della Mirandola. With great courtesy, both, seeing that I was a stranger, stopped and spoke to me. They moved on as the beautiful woman

approached, but not until Lucrezia had whispered that the fairest of fair women was Gaspara Stampa.

As she came near I bowed reverently.

"You cannot know me, sir," she said, in a voice of great beauty and sweetness, "and yet I seem to see recognition in your eyes."

"I have read the sonnets of the Italian Sappho; and whenever I think of Vittoria Colonna or Veronica Gambara, I remember the greatest of the three women poets of Italy, Gaspara Stampa."

"Sir, I thank you for your courtesy. But can it be that at this remote date you know the story of the most unhappy woman of her time?"

"The Lady Gaspara Stampa would not wish me to say anything against the Lord of Collalto; otherwise I should speak bitterly of one who caused such sorrow to the beautiful *Anasilla*."

"Ah, by your mention of that love-name, I see you do indeed know. It would be a pleasure to me to hear many things from you, and to exchange similar courtesies on my part, but unfortunately I must go hence immediately. I am here only for one end. I wish to see face to face that famous—or infamous—woman who—but no, let me use no hard names: are not all we women dry wood before the flame?—that famous lady of France, Diane de Poitiers, who seduced my fair love from me. If you can direct me towards her, I am yours in a true debt. I could not ask Titian or Sansovino or the Lady Lucrezia Gambara, or still less Aretino; not even my dear friends Cornelia or Violetta:¹ for one and all know my story, and are of my own time."²

I scarce knew what to do. The lady for whom Gaspara Stampa had inquired was present. Unfortunately she was to be seen just as she is in her picture by a French painter who may, but more likely may not have been François Clouet (Janet). Visitors to the Grafton Gallery will remember the strange portrait of Diane de Poitiers on the right side of the Octagon Room. The celebrated favourite of François I. and Henri II. is there represented in a half-covered bath, eating fruit, and looking vaguely about her, while other members of a very Flemish household conduct themselves indifferently. Diane here is certainly beautiful in her kind, but how poor a creature she seemed, to have won the love of a

¹ Cornelia, sister of Titian; Violetta, daughter of Jacopo Palma.

² This story has been admirably told by the American painter, Mr. Eugene Benson, to whose little book I acknowledge my indebtedness.

Venetian noble of the rarest distinction who had loved and been loved by the most beautiful and brilliant woman of the age.

However, there was nothing for it but to be frank.

"There, madam, is Diane, Duchesse de Valentinois—there, near that corridor. You will observe that she has not yet finished her toilette."

For more than a minute Gaspara Stampa looked steadily at Diane de Poitiers. Then she turned, and her beautiful eyes were like the yellow flames of a black panther.

"I have forgiven the Lord of Collalto for what no man should be forgiven; but now I can no longer bear him in reverence. If the woman had been more beautiful than I, I would have been content: but she is not even sweet and fair—not decent even. Surely she might have been content with the folly of two kings without dragging down the fair ideal and fair manhood of the noblest of Venetians?"

I could not bear to witness the pain of the beautiful speaker. Yet, glancing again at Diane de Poitiers, my indignation rose and I could look at her no more. When I turned, Gaspara Stampa had vanished.

"*Ah, la bell' Saffo de' nostri tempi alta Gaspara!*" This, sighed rather than spoken, attracted my attention to a person who stood beside me.

"I am the Venetian poet, Parabosco, the organist of San Marco," he resumed, without further preamble. "Perhaps you have read what I wrote of the lovely Gaspara, of her surpassing beauty, her surpassing sweetness and nobility, her surpassing genius? I would you and all who admire her could hear the funeral chant of six voices which I composed, and caused to be rendered publicly, on the occasion of her death—death not from her own hand, as commonly said, but from the extremity of thwarted love, of unrequited passion. This *Requiem* is still preserved, I may add, in the Library of San Marco."

"When next I go to Venice, Signor Parabosco, I will have it sought out and copied."

"*Grazie!* And now, can I be of any service to you before I leave? Our present span of life goes by minutes, you must know."

"Tell me, then, who are some of those Fair Women whom we see around us?"

"That lady who passed just now is, I should say was, very famous in the middle of the sixteenth century. You would not know her name, however, as Il Bacchiacca did not paint it on the back of his canvas,

and as, I have reason to know, she has had no other chronicler. She was famous only for her beauty, and for the mystery attending her. Francisco Ubertini himself knew nothing of her, when one day she appeared in his house, and asked him to paint her. At that time Il Bacchiacca was young and unknown, and he welcomed the opportunity. When he had painted the portrait, that which you now see before you, he asked the lady in what way he could show his gratitude. 'By bequeathing the picture to the City of Florence.' 'To what end?' he inquired. 'Because I wish to be remembered by the males of my time, and of all time to come,' was the strange answer.¹ The rumour of her beauty spread abroad : many strange things were told of her : and about her scores of *novelle* were written. But to this day, no one knows anything authentic of her."

"And these two beautiful women who are walking together?"

"The one nearer to us is Violetta Palma. Do you admire her? In my youth she was looked upon as a beautiful woman of the true Venetian type, though many of my fellow-citizens preferred the still more sensuous beauty of her present companion, who was, well, not her mother, but the informal wife of her father, Jacopo Palma."

As a matter of fact I had already recognised the two Fair Women painted by Paris Bordone and Palma Vecchio ; but only to exchange the admiration I felt for them for a greater admiration of two ladies near them, *grandes dames* beyond question. A glance at the pictures on the wall told me who they were : the younger, that Isabella d'Este whom Pordenone (and not Giorgione) painted, the Lady Gonzaga herself, of whom many have forgotten that she was daughter to Ercole, Duke of Ferrara and Modena, and wife of Francesco Gonzaga, last Lord of Mantua, but none that she was a poet and scholar worthy to be named after that Marchese di Pescara whom Michael Angelo loved, or that Gaspara whom all honoured as a new Sappho : the elder, the superb Lucrezia Borgia, by whom Lorenzo Lotto won so much fame. This great lady still carried in her hand the drawing wherein is foreoutlined her own death at her own hand. She was the most impressive woman among all three, of a stern but potent beauty.

"For myself," broke in Messer Parabosco, "I prefer the less

¹ This is an authentic anecdote, but for Il Bacchiacca substitute the name of Félicien Rops, the living Belgian painter and etcher.

magnificent but more mysterious and seductive Milanese lady yonder, whom Luini painted a short time before she poisoned her lover for becoming over-bold in her presence, and thereafter poisoned her husband because he laughed at his rival's ignominious death. The beautiful Milanese is of the type of women who are not content with winning the bodies of men, but must enslave their very souls also. Ah, Luini and the Milan painters knew what beauty was !”

“That is strange from a Venetian ! But doubtless you were a scholar, Signor Parabosco, and so loved only what was remote. Ah ! forgive that past tense : it was a slip of the tongue ! Yet surely the very type you admire is not, at its highest, Milanese, but Florentine ? The very quintessence, the crown, the aloe-bloom of this kind of art, is it not Leonardo's Monna Lisa del Giocondo ? Why, in your own Accademia delle belle Arti in Venice there is a drawing by Leonardo, a beautiful girl with sidelong rippling hair, delicately crowned with vine-leaves, with that enigmatical smile on her face and still more enigmatical smile in her eyes, which is finer than this Milanese beauty ! It is a type that does not appeal to many men, but where its appeal is felt at all it is irresistible. There is all the seduction of nameless peril in these mysterious faces, which apparently tell nothing, and yet are so full of subtle meaning and repressed intensity.”¹

“True. But I am myself foolishly prejudiced against everything Florentine. As for the early Florentine ideal of female beauty, it seems to me grotesque. Look at that lady there, famous in her own day for her looks and celebrated for ever by Angelo Politian and Pulci and other Florentine poets. Yes, she *is* ‘la bella Simonetta,’ as you say. There is no fictitious flattery here. Giuliano de' Medici was not the man to make her his mistress unless she were considered pre-eminently beautiful. Have you seen her before, may I ask ?”

“I think so. Did not Piero di Cosimo paint her ? Among the pictures belonging to a great French lord, the Duc d'Aumale, at Chantilly, there is a *Cleopatra* which is supposed to be this very Simonetta.”

“Do you admire her greatly ?”

¹ Very remarkable, also, for this mysterious charm is the famous *Wax Bust of a Girl* in the Lille Museum, till recently always spoken of as by Raphael, but now recognised as a Florentine work of the fifteenth century. An extraordinarily skilful reproduction of it on canvas by Mr. Sargent is now at the Grafton Gallery (May—July).



Portrait of a Lady

Watercolor

Portrait of a Lady.

"Frankly, no. But see, who is that strange man to whom she is speaking, and why does he turn away from her and every one else with so weary and distraught a look? Can that be Piero?"

"No; it is Alessandro Filipepi, who painted her—the great artist whom doubtless you know better as Sandro Botticelli. You may not be aware that the divine Sandro became melancholy in his latter years, and would have nothing to do with Art, or Fair Women, or any of the shows and vanities of the world. La bella Simonetta can only remind him of a past he would fain forget. But see! Here is a letter. I may as well give it to you, so that it may be made known to men at last."

As Parabosco spoke, he drew from his pocket an antique leathern case o'erfretted with thin silver trceries, and extracted from it a yellow sheet of paper, worn to the extreme of thinness. It was like the last leaf of a poplar against the last sunset of autumn.

"What is this that you entrust to me?" I asked eagerly.

"It is a letter that was written by the Florentine painter, Cosimo Rosselli. Its companion has been lost to eternal fame because of a moth. But this which I give you has been seen of no man since myself, not even by that Vasari of whom we have heard so much. At Botticelli's death, in 1510, it came into the possession of Aretino, and was by him given to me in exchange for a little ivory group of Leda and the Swan. It is addressed to Cosimo's pupil and disciple (and, in time, surpassing master) Piero. It will reveal to you something of that sadness which came upon the great Botticelli."

"He would be sadder still, my friend," I could not help saying, "if he knew how many fifth-rate pictures were now attributed to him, and how many pseudo-æsthetic puerilities have been solemnly uttered over his (or most often some one else's) work."

But I had cause to lament my malappropiate remark as soon as it was made. With a look of anger and astonishment Parabosco faded. To my great joy the letter was not in his hand, and so did not fade also. I regret that I have no longer the original; it was too transparent, and the chemic action of the light caused it to crumble into dust. But I remembered it word for word; and have elsewhere given a literal translation.¹

¹ Vide *The Scottish Art Review* for January and March 1890. ("The Lost Journal of Piero di Cosimo.") Let me take this late opportunity of thanking the conscientious London critic who adjudged my "translation" as inadequate and poor, he having compared it throughout with the original! Thus doth the Lord sometimes deliver one's enemies into one's hand!

At this moment I was about to make my obeisance to a stately coif'd dame who passed by—the Queen of Cyprus, that Catarina Cornaro whom



Portrait of a Lady. By Piero della Francesca.

Titian has represented with art so consummate ; but even as I looked my eyes grew dim.

In a confused array, no longer Venetian or even Italian, I saw all that company disappear ; an emaciated Fair Woman, who is said to have



The Countess of Suffolk. By Daniel Mytens.

inspired the famous Ferrara painter, Piero della Francesca ; Saskia, the [comely wife of Rembrandt ; the Countess of Pembroke, whom

Gheeraedts painted, known to fame as "Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother," from her zealous care for the *Arcadia* after her brother's death ; that other great lady, the Countess of Suffolk, so ably painted by D. Mytens ; a repentant Magdalen, who to my astonishment passed as the Lady Jane Grey, and as the daughter-in-art of Lucas de Heere—two strange mistakes, surely !—and others whom I need not mention or have already spoken of. The two latest, whom I saw just before all became obscure, were not the least noteworthy. One was the noble and splendid lady, whom Sir Antonio rejoiced to paint with all his skill, that Elizabeth de Valois daughter of Henri II. of France, and wife of Philip II. of Spain, who is memorable to us rather as the heroine of Schiller's master-tragedy, *Don Carlos*. The other was that heroic but, alas ! somewhat malodorous princess, Isabella the Infanta, who, on her marriage with the Archduke of Austria, received the sovereignty of the Netherlands as a dowry ; the same who, at the beginning of the famous siege of Ostend in 1601, vowed that she would not change her linen until the town was taken. Unfortunately, Ostend did not succumb till three years had elapsed ! This is the origin of the colour known as *Couleur Isabelle* ; so peculiarly had time and its allies dealt with the once snowy hue of the Archduchess's linen.

Perhaps it was the approach of this brave but too conscientious Archduchess—or "the rush of my emotions," as the novelists say—but at that moment I swooned.

III

When I came to, I was agreeably surprised to find my head in the lap of an unmistakable Fair Woman.

Before I had time to move I heard twelve strike, and by the broad daylight knew that it was noon.

Beside me was some one or something causing unnecessary pain to the calf of my leg. I half rose, and looked behind me. Imagine my astonishment to see a Cupid, perhaps Cupidon himself, standing close by, clearly sulking, and at intervals jaggling at my leg with an unpleasantly sharp arrow. I was about to remonstrate, when an abrupt hiss to my right made me start. I caught a glimpse of a snake, and the next moment was on my feet.

"Madam," I exclaimed in considerable perturbation, "are you aware that there is a viper beside you ?"



George Romney, Pinx.

Walter F. Gilbey, Ph. Sc.

Lady Hamilton as Ariadne

"Ah, I thought you were only a belated critic," replied the Fair Woman with an amused smile.

"Pray do not joke. It is too serious. Look, don't you see it? The Snake in the Grass!"

"Oh, is that all, sir? If you knew Sir Joshua he would tell you that it is only dangerous to those who fear it, or who have listened to its hissing till it sounds like a pleasing music. Alas! many poor women have listened overlong. Even now, I admit, as you were lying helpless with your head on my lap, I was so preoccupied that I heard neither the sweet seduction of the adder's changed voicing, nor the stealthy approach of that rascally little Cupid there who tried to wrest away—"

"Ah!"

The exclamation was wrung from me by a sudden pain. Cupid had taken the opportunity to shoot an arrow at me. If it had not reached my heart, it at least got near enough to make that virginal possession beat faster.

A beautiful smile came into my late ministrant's face. Her eyes were lamps of home.

In another moment I should have been lost. I stooped and took Cupid by the shoulders, and flung him into a little pool close by; then, with a sudden gesture caught the snake by the tail, twirled him round and round, and sent him spinning into the obscure Reynoldsian background.

As an art-critic with a pot to keep boiling, I had no other course open to me. Fancy the damage to an art-critic's chances in life if the rumour got about that he had surreptitiously gone away with the lady whom Sir Joshua painted in his picture called *The Snake in the Grass*! It would be the Duchess of Devonshire scandal over again!

"Deliver us from evil," said a sweet, clear voice beyond me. I looked, and saw a demure but winsome lady in a nun's garb.

"Who is that sweet saint?" I whispered to my companion.

"That—eh, ah, did you say *saint*? That is Lady Hamilton. She was, I understand, a nursery-maid at Hawarden. She had a *friend*, the Hon. Charles Greville, whom she rewarded by marrying his uncle Sir William Hamilton, the Ambassador at Naples. There, as you have doubtless heard, she transferred her affections to your great hero, Nelson."



Mademoiselle Hillsberg. By John Hoppner, R.A.

I looked as reprovingly as was possible at so sweet a face, but with a laugh Miss Emma Lyon sprang to her feet, and before I could beg her to be careful had sprung into an adjacent canvas, and the next moment was posing as the deserted Ariadne.

I was eager to join her, but just then Mr. Hoppner strolled up and begged me to give him my opinion of the beauty as well as of the dancing of a tall and handsome young woman whom I saw on the dais. "It is Mdlle. Hillsberg," he whispered, "and I may say that my portrait of her is, in my own opinion, the best thing I ever did."

"Yes, indeed, more truly than most here, she was a Fair Woman."

I think Mr. Hoppner was a little absent-minded as well as slightly deaf, for he reiterated (with a slight but material difference):—

"Yes, yes, to be sure, like most here, she was a Frail Woman."

IV

I have not time to tell all I saw and learned under the guidance of Mr. Hoppner. He introduced me to several beautiful or comely women who had sat to him for their portraits, and also to ladies who had in the same way favoured Sir Joshua and Thomas Gainsborough, Romney and Sir Thomas Lawrence, Raeburn and Sir William Beechey.

I cared most for dark-eyed and winsome Lady Kenyon and those ladies whom I met in company with Mr. Hoppner and Mr. Romney, though I was agreeably surprised with Sir William's daughter-in-art, Evelina, and more than ordinarily glad to see again, with Sir Joshua, the Duchess of Rutland, who in the early decades of our century was the reigning beauty; Mrs. Siddons, as the "Tragic Muse"; and the fair but frail Mrs. Mary Robinson, as "Perdita". Not less delighted was I to meet, with Sir Thomas Lawrence, the famous comic actress Eliza Farren, Countess of Derby, as good as she was beautiful; and with Mr. Gainsborough, Mrs. Fitzherbert, the morganatic wife of George, Prince of Wales; the famous actress, Dorothy Bland (Mrs. Jordan); and Mrs. Sheridan.

To my surprise I overheard some persons praising that Duchess of Devonshire whom Angelica Kauffmann painted. Possibly she was



Laay Kenyon. By John Hoppner, R.A

beautiful at the date when Gibbon the historian, who was enamoured of her, said that "if she chose to beckon the Lord Chancellor from his woolsack, he could not resist obedience" ; but now I, for one, looked at her without the least wish to look again.

Incidentally, I may add that I noticed with pleasure a few children, none more winsome than the dainty little maid whom Reynolds has immortalised as "Collina," none more quaint than the "auld-farrant wean," whom Drouais painted blowing soap-bubbles. What a delightful Exhibition that would be which would consist entirely of children. We all hear the innumerable murmur of little feet. Not one of us but would rejoice in a Fair Children show.

But now let me be frank. Out of all these Fair Women was there one who embodied my ideal of womanly beauty? This is a question that every one would have to put to himself with the same apparent arrogance, as if any one individual's opinion had the least value for others, or had anything to do with the Beauty of Woman.

No. Though I saw a few beautiful, and many lovely, and scores of comely and handsome women, in no instance did I encounter one of whom in any conceivable circumstances I could say "*There: she is my Eve*, past, present, and for ever!"

"I am always waiting," wrote Amiel, "for the woman and the work which shall be capable of taking entire possession of my soul, and of becoming my end and aim." Yes, with Stendhal, we all wait: and one man in a million is rewarded with "the woman", to one man in a generation comes "the work."

What is wanting? must the glow of personal romance be present before a beautiful woman can embody for us the Beauty of Woman?

"Araminta's grand and shrill,
Delia's passionate and frail,
Doris drives an earnest quill,
Athanasia takes the veil;
Wiser Phyllis o'er her pail,
At the heart of all romance
Reading, sings to Strephon's flail,
'Fate's a fiddler, Life's a dance'."

Cannot Araminta and Delia be beautiful, though Strephon may prefer Phyllis? Or is beauty in women as incalculable a quantity as the delight

men take in women's names? There are names that stir one like a trumpet, or like the sound of the sea, or like the ripple of leaves : names



Girl Blowing Bubbles. By J. G. Drouais.

that have the magic of moonlight in them, that are sirens whose witchery can in a moment enslave us. What good to give this or that sweet name : each man has in him his own necromancy wherewith to conjure up

vague but haunting-sweet visions. Equally, if all Fair Women of the Imagination or of Life have names we love, there are designations that seem like sacrilege, that grate, that excruciate. There is a deep truth in Balzac's insistence on the correspondence between character and nomenclature. Still, there are many debateable names. "Anna," for example, is not offensive, yet I "cannot away with it," though tolerant of "Annie." But hear what Mr. Henley has to say :—

"Brown is for Lalage, Jones for Lelia,
Robinson's bosom for Beatrice glows,
Smith is a Hamlet before Ophelia.
The glamour stays if the reason goes :
Every lover the years disclose
Is of a beautiful name made free.
One befriends, and all others are foes :
Anna's the name of names for me.

* * * * *

"Fie upon Caroline, Jane, Amelia—
These I reckon the essence of prose !—
Mystical Magdalen, cold Cornelia,
Adelaide's attitudes, Mopsa's mowes,
Maud's magnificence, Totty's toes,
Poll and Bet with their twang of the sea,
Nell's impertinence, Pamela's woes !
Anna's the name of names for me !"

But to return : everywhere Ideala evaded me. It was a vain quest, though again and again I caught just a glimpse of her, a vanishing gleam, a fugitive glance. Once I was startled by the sudden light in the face of "Miranda," though when I looked again I was no more than haunted by an impalpable suggestion. In the beauty of the flowing drapery, in the breath of that sea frothing at her feet, somewhere there was an evanescent grace that belonged to Ideala. Yet it was not quite hers after all, any more than the indwelling beauty, seen perhaps only for a moment, in the eyes, or revealed in a momentary light upon the face, was hers—the beauty, the momentary light in *Miranda*, in the gipsy-beauty of her of the *Snake in the Grass*, in one or two other portraits of a more delicately refined loveliness, or of the higher beauty, that of the beautiful mind visible through the fair mask of the flesh. Long ago, says Thoreau in

Walden, "I lost a hound, a bay-horse, and a turtle-dove, and am still on their trail." I think She whom we seek rides afar on that fleet-horse, espied for ever by that flying dove, for ever pursued by that tireless hound.

No doubt it was absurd to expect to find *Ideala* even among portraits of women who may have been her kindred in the eyes of one or two persons who could discern not only the outward beauty, but the inner radiance. Moreover, the company was not exactly that amid which one would pursue one's quest. Diane de Poitiers, Nell Gwynne, Mrs. Jane Middleton, the Countess of Grammont, the Comtesse de Parabère, "Perdita," Lady Hamilton, Mlle. Hillsberg, Lady Ellenborough, Mrs. Grace Dalrymple Elliot, and Elizabeth Foster, Duchess of Devonshire, were one and all charming as well as beautiful women. But presumably Charles did not discern his soul's counterpart in Nell Gwynne, nor the Regent Philippe in "la belle Parabère," nor the amorous George in "Perdita," nor either Prince Schwartzberg or the Arab Sheik in Lady Ellenborough.

In order to judge, one must know. We, who do not know these Fair Women of the past, cannot judge. We must each seek an *Ideala* of our own. After all, as some one has said, women are like melons : it is only after having tasted them that we know whether they are good or not.

We must be content with some one short of *Perfecta*. Unequal unions are deplorable. Moreover, it is very unsatisfactory to emulate the example of the celebrated Parisian *bouquineur*, who worried through life without a copy of Virgil, because he could not succeed in finding the ideal Virgil of his dreams. *Ideala* is as the wind that cometh and goeth where it listeth. Rather, she may be likened to the Wind for ever fleeting along "that nameless but always discoverable road which leads the wayfarer to the forest of beautiful dreams."¹

Moreover, She may appear anywhere, at any time. Remember Cam-pion's "She's not to one form tied." Possibly, even, she may be called Nell Gwynne ; for to every Nell there will be a lover to whom she will be Helen.

¹ *Vide* Mrs. Wingate Rinder's Introduction to her recently published delightful anthology of *Poems of Nature*.



Nell Gwynne. By Sir Peter Lely.

“Helen, thy beauty is to me
 Like those Nicean barks of yore,
 That gently, o’er a perfumed sea,
 The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
 To his own native shore.

“Lo! in yon brilliant window niche,
 How statue-like I see thee stand,
 The agate lamp within thy hand!
 Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
 Are Holy Land!”

It is a pity that where a Helen is so evident to one passionate pilgrim, she should merely be Nell to the world in general. But so it is; and, alas! the very last person to perceive the connection with Psyche is often Nell herself. Poets get little gratitude, as a rule, for the glorification they effect. Poor bards! they are apt to address as Ideala those who would rather be called Nell, and dedicate their deepest life-music to a mistress who, while flattered, really understands neither the poetry nor the poet, and can be more eloquent over a gift of gloves than over a work of genius. Thus hath it ever been; doubtless thus it shall continue. As long as there are fair women, there will be strong men ready to lose their highest heritage for a mess of pottage. As among the innumerable kinds of flowers where the bee may roam and gather honey there is that flower of Trebizond whose fatal blooms allure the unwitting insect to madness or death, so among women there are some who irresponsibly lure men to sure calamity. Who was the man who said that fair women are fair demons who make us enter hell through the door of paradise? Doubtless *he* loved a flower of Trebizond. Idealists, ponder!

Nevertheless, though we would not naturally seek Ideala among the Nell Gwynnes, it would be a mistake to rise to the high remote air where dwell the saints who have not yet transcended mortality. A touch of sin must be in that man whom we hail as brother, that woman we greet as sister. There was shrewd worldly wisdom in the remark of a French prince, that, however virtuous a woman may be, a compliment on her virtue is what gives her the least pleasure. Concurrently we may take that instructive passage in Cunningham’s *British Painters* where we learn how Hoppner complained of the painted ladies of Sir Thomas

Lawrence that they showed "a gaudy dissoluteness of taste, and sometimes trespassed on moral as well as professional chastity," while by implication he claimed for his own portraits purity of look as well as purity of style : with this result—"Nor is it the least curious part of this story, that the ladies, from the moment of the sarcasm of Hoppner, instead of crowding to the easel of him who dealt in the loveliness of virtue, showed a growing preference for the rival who 'trespassed on moral as well as on professional chastity.'"

Women should not be wroth with men because that each male, sound of heart and brain, is a Ponce da Leon. Parenthetically, let me add—on the authority of Arsène Houssaye !—that all the energies of Creation do not succeed in producing throughout the whole world one hundred *grandes dames* yearly. And how many of these die as little girls—how few attain to "la beauté souveraine du corps et de l'âme"? "Voilà," he adds—"voilà pourquoi la grande dame est une oiseau rare. Où est le merle blanc?" "The Quest of the White Blackbird" : fair women, ponder this significant phrase. We all seek the Fountain of Youth, the Golden Isles, Avalon, Woman (as distinct from the fairest of women), Ideala, or whatever sunbright word or words we cap our quest with. If wives could but know it, they have more cause to be jealous of women who have never lived than of any rival "young i' the white and red." Yet, paradoxically, with a true man, a wife, if she be a true woman, need never turn her back upon the impalpable Dream ; for, after all, it is her counterpart, a rainbow-phantom.

Fair Women, *all* men are not travailing with love of you ! There are Galileos who would say *e pur se muove*, though Woman suddenly became *passée*, nay, though she became a by no means indispensable adjunct. It is even possible there are base ones among us who may envy the Australian god Pundjel, who has a wife whom he may not see !

Alas, Fair Women only laugh when they behold Man going solitary to the tune of

"O ! were there an island,
Though ever so wild,
Where women might smile, and
No man be beguiled !"

PART III

“And I said, ‘By the love I bear you, visions of beauty, come before me and play me magnificent shows.’”—LEIGH HUNT, *A Sight of the Gods*.

“Not these alone : but every legend fair
Which the supreme Caucasian mind
Carved out of Nature for itself, was there,
Not less than life, designed.”—TENNYSON.

I

It will be news to most people, as it was to the present writer, that there was a Fair Woman exhibition other than that at the Grafton. In fact, the one I allude to is not of a season, but perennial.

It is called the Kennaquhair Gallery.

Presumably there is a byway into it from the Grafton : at any rate, I found myself there one day when I had traversed the several rooms and was by the farther wall of the End Gallery. I had been looking at Van Dyck's *Venetia*, wife of the celebrated Sir Kenelm Digby, concerning whose beauty and attainments rumour was so busy, and about whose complaisance gossip was so rife : and was vaguely wondering if it was true that her husband had killed her by giving her viper-wine to preserve that beauty of which he was so proud : when I stepped suddenly into a passage I had never descried before. There was a moment's darkness, then the gleam of the golden letters inscribed above a portal of sunlit marble : “The Kennaquhair Gallery.” In less than a minute I paid my price of rainbow-gold, and stood within.

My first glance bewildered me.

Before me was an immense gallery, on both walls of which hung, in a single line, and with a wide space between each canvas, an innumerable series of pictures.

The glow, the colour, the lovely radiance, the immediate sense of an indefinable air of beauty and ideal grace—all this, with something of

haunting reminiscence, with something of dreams realised, is indescribable.

My bewilderment became greater on the discovery that as soon as one stood opposite any canvas it was absolutely vacant !

No, I was not dreaming ! There was the room, there were other visitors moving to and fro, there were the pictures, there was the glow, the radiance.

It was only then I noticed a catalogue in my hand. I did not remember having taken or been given one. With eager curiosity I looked at it, and then turned to its preface. Externally the legend ran thus :—

THE KENNAQUHAIR GALLERY OF FAIR WOMEN

(ENGLISH SECTION).

*Chaucer to Swinburne
and the Later Victorians.*

On the first page was the following note, prefatory to a brief introduction by a Mr. Dreemer, with whose name I was not familiar :—

* Visitors to the Kennaquhair Gallery must bear in mind (1) that the artist is never to be held responsible for the aspect of his picture in the eyes of the person who realises it ; (2) that in almost every instance the painter's own vision will transcend that of the person to whom he appeals ; (3) that frequently the lines of Depicture cannot be realised fully without previous knowledge of their context ; (4) though the hues in which these Word-Pictures are painted are immortal, they are apt to be fugitive at times, at times somewhat dulled, at times radiant to the exclusion of everything else ; but in each case, the reality or vagueness of the vision will depend upon the visitor himself ; (5) no pictures are for sale, though replicas of one or many can be carried away in the mind without charge or interference on the part of the Directors, who, however, have nothing to do with the liability of these replicas to fade ; (6) the Kennaquhair Gallery is open to all, without any distinction, and at all hours of the day or night, Sundays included ; (7) entrance granted immediately on presentation of a piece of rainbow-gold, which can be had in any quantity on application at the House Beautiful. N.B. For the sake of the common weal, those who have not even a patch of the Ideal Life wherewith to hide the barrenness of their souls cannot gain entrance to the House Beautiful.

** The Galleries are at present arranged as follows : I. English. II. Scottish. III. Irish. IV. Celtic. V. Ancient Greek. VI. Ancient Italian. VII. Renaissance Italian. VIII. Modern Italian. IX. French. X. Provençal. XI. Spanish. XII. Portuguese. XIII. Flemish and Belgian and Dutch. XIV. Scandinavian. XV. Slavonic. XVI.-XIX. Oriental : Ancient and Modern. XX.-XXIII. America, North and South. XXIV.-XXV. Miscellaneous.

* * In a few instances there are adjacent rooms: e.g. beside the first portrayal of Beatrice, there is a Dante Room; beside the strangely beautiful dark woman, called *The Worser Spirit*, by Shakespere, there opens off the large Shakespere Gallery; again there are a Spenser Room, a Byron Room, a Tennyson Room, a Browning Room, a Meredith Room, a Swinburne Room. Thus, also, in all the Foreign Galleries there are some separate chambers: e.g. in the Greek section a Homer Room; in the Roman, a Virgil Room; in the German, a Goethe Room; in the French, a Voltaire Room, a Victor Hugo Room, and others. By a slight exercise of a mental process these rooms can be entered and enjoyed exclusively, or their contents can be seen on line.

* * A piece of rainbow-gold will at any time procure an optical illusion whereby one or more pictures may be isolated; or whereby chronological sequence may be set at naught. Thus the Helen of Homer and the Helen of Marlowe may be seen side by side. In a word, the rainbow-gold can, if wished, be used as an irresistible spell over time, history, space.

On the next page I read:—

FAIR WOMEN

PAINTED BY THE POETS AND ROMANCISTS

Thereafter followed the preface.

FEMINA.

The most beautiful women are those who have never lived, as we understand it.

These are wrought of Beauty, Ideal Love, Immortality. Their garments are lovely words, their voice is music, the light upon their faces is the morning glory of Imagination.

These Fair Women are the daughters of the Soul of Man by the Beauty of the World, whom he calls Femina. They are immortal, for even if in the passage of years, or through accident, they fade in the memories of mankind, they live again in the ever new and beautiful births which are the offspring of this divine marriage.

Time, however, cannot touch their pictured loveliness. They are limned on a canvas beyond the reach of the moth. They are in the mind of man as the innumerable stars are in the firmament.

Femina is born daily. Her soul, Ideala, weaves a rainbow for ever. In the weaving, Femina is wooed by the Soul of Man; when the weft is woven, the lovely Dreams are born; when the rainbow fades, while another is swiftly woven from it, its fugitive glories drift into the Looms of Life,

and become the golden threads that are spun into the mind of every human being.

Femina is neither good nor evil. With her right hand she can guide men to the Gates of Heaven, with her left she can lead them to the Portals of Hell. When the Soul of Man first wooed her, she said: "The daughters I shall have will be many: there will be the daughters of Love, the daughters of Passion, the daughters of Lust, the daughters of Hope, the daughters of Joy, the daughters of Dream, the daughters of Pain, the daughters of Sorrow, the daughters of Despair, and the daughters of Vengeance."

"All these," said the Soul of Man, "I foresee and know, save the last."

"Even so," replied *Femina*; "for this thing shall be betwixt women and men to the end of days; that among my daughters will be Daughters of Vengeance."

II

A brilliant French wit, Rivarol, wrote that one could make a great book of what has not been said.

Some day a man of genius will tell us the story of Femina.

It will not be a woman. A woman would better than a man understand what Femina meant and means by the Daughters of Vengeance, but she would relent. Even if passée, she would still remember. With women who have been beautiful, remembrance is as fatal a dissolvent to resolution as temptation is to youth.

Moreover, the author of FEMINA must have lived the dual life of sex. As yet, woman has not lived the life of man.

Once more, the task would need supreme genius. Genius is not enfranchised from the laws of physiology. Let Rivarol, again, say the rest: "Heaven has refused genius to woman, in order to concentrate all the fire in her heart."

III

There are two Don Juans. We all know one; the other is he who loves Femina, Ideala, in all her daughters, no man being able to see Femina herself. But this other can become impassioned only in the mind. He may love woman, or women; he can yearn after Ideala only. With the old Florentine painter he can say, the only passionate life is in form and colour.

Don Juan II. owes his best happiness, his rarest joy, to the magicians whose spell is the spell of words that have lain in the moonlight of the imagination, and thereafter gone forth rapt in dream, filled with strange madness.

Don Juan, enter ! The magicians you love are here ; here are the Fair Women of the Imagination of all time ; here, in one, in many, in none perhaps and yet in all, is Ideala.

II

Having perused these preliminary pages, I looked to see what followed. A single quotation heralded the catalogue and the pictures :—

“Beauty is the Sun of Life : and these are the Courtiers of the Sun”—
a line doubtless suggested by a famous passage in Jeremy Taylor :
“ [These] have splendid fires and aromattick spices, rich wines and well digested fruits, great wit and great courage, because they dwell in his Eye and look on his Face and are the Courtiers of the Sun.”

The catalogue I held in my hand was that for the English section only. The names of the painters began with Chaucer, and came down in point of date as recently as to Francis Thompson.¹

It was with joy I recognised innumerable Fair Women, from the Creseida of Chaucer's *Troylus* and the lovely Una of *The Faërie Queene*, to the blithe and sweet singer of *Pippa Passes* and the pathetic-eyed Pompilia of *The Ring and the Book* ; the Guenevere of Malory, and the Guenevere of *The Idylls of the King*, and the Guenevere of William Morris ; the haunting eyes and strange dream-faces of those whom I had known in *The House of Life* ; the supreme Iseult of *Tristram of Lyonesse*.

“Hath love not likewise led them further yet,
Out through the years where memories rise and set,
Some large as suns, some moon-like warm and pale,
Some starry-sighted, some through clouds that sail
Seen as red flame through spectral float of fume,
Each with the blush of its own special bloom
On the fair face of its own coloured light,
Distinguishable in all the host of night,
Divisible from all the radiant rest
And separable in splendour? Hath the best

¹ *Vide* the final lines quoted on the last page.

Light of love's all, of all that burn and move,
 A better heaven than heaven is? Hath not love
 Made for all these their sweet particular air
 To shine in, their own beams and names to bear,
 Their ways to wander and their wards to keep,
 Till story and song and glory and all things sleep?
 Hath he not plucked from death of lovers dead
 Their musical soft memories, and kept red
 The rose of their remembrance in men's eyes?"

From picture to picture I went with ever new delight. What blithe gladness to recognise, on a canvas by Chaucer, among a series called *The Legende of Good Women*, a Dido outlined immediately one had perused the lines on the frame:—

"The fressshē lady, of the citee queene,
 Stood in the temple, in her estat royalle,
 So richēly, and eke so faire withalle,
 So yong, so lusty, with her eighen glade,
 That yf the God that heven and erthē made
 Wolde have a love, for beautē and goodnesse,
 And womanhode, and trouthe, and semlynesse,
 Whom sholde he loven but this lady swete?"

Then, a little further on, the same artist's *Queen Alcestis*, clad like a daisy, and walking hand in hand with Love, the God himself lovely

"In silke, embrouded ful of greenē greves,
 In with a fret of redērosē leves,
 The freshest syne the world was first begonne."

Beautiful, indeed, she seemed, clad in royal green,

"A fret of gold she haddē next her heer,
 And upon that a whit coroune shee beer,
 With flourouns smale, and that I shall not lye,
 For al the world ryght as a dayēsye
 Ycorouned ys with whitē levēs lyte,
 So were the flourouns of hire coroune white;
 For of so perlē, fyne, oriental,
 Hire whitē corounē was imassed al
 For which the whitē coroune above the greene
 Made hire lyke a dayesie for to sene."

A few lines on another frame, in the immortal series of *The Canterbury Tales*, recreated in a moment, in all its vivid details, dainty Madame Eglentyne, with her "mouth ful smal and thereto softe and red," with "eyēn greye as glas."

Suddenly I caught sight of a frame whose panel bore the name of King James of Scotland as artist. I had no sooner read certain lines than I saw that lovely Lady Joanna Beaufort, "the fairest or the freschest youngē floure" that ever bloomed, who, walking in the garden one springtide morn, was seen of the King who was to love and woo and win her, and by her beauty sent "astert The blude of all his body to his hert." Many other half-discerned features gleamed before me, till I smiled as I recognised, on a canvas by Skelton, winsome "Merry Margaret."

"Mirry Margaret,
As mydsomer flowre;
Jentill as fawcoun
Or hawke of the towere;
* * * * *
Stedfast of thought,
Well made, well wrought."

But I think that in all that wondrous company of Fair Women, from Chaucer's Dido to Spenser's Una, and from Shakespere's Dark Rosaline to the Iseult of our greatest living poet, I loved none so well as those of the unknown balladists of the north country. Not even in that circle of the Elizabethans where thrilling voices spake and strange and lovely visions arose did I linger so lovingly as with those tragic dreams, the Lady Margaret who lies in "Mary's Quire," Burd Helen, May Margaret whom Clerk Saunders loved so passing well, that too heedless "Kinges daughter of Normandye" whom Glasgerion trysted with, she of the Dowie Dens o' Yarrow, and the brave daughter of the House of Forbes for whom even bloody Edom o' Gordon sorrowed a moment.

"O bonnie, bonnie was her mouth,
And cherry were her cheeks,
And clear, clear was her yellow hair,
Whereon her red blood sleeps.
"Then wi' his spear he turn'd her owre;
O gin her face was wan!
He said, 'Ye are the first that e'er
I wish'd alive again.'"

Let whoso knows the incalculable richness of English poetry, from Shakespere to the youngest of the Victorians, imagine, even on first rapid

consideration, the innumerable lovely pictures or suggestive outlines of Fair Women! Let those who will prefer the Cleopatra of Mr. Alma Tadema! Beautiful in her way she may be, but what of lost magic, of incommunicable charm, of lost glow and passion, compared with Her of the Kennaquhair Gallery! Think not only of the Elizabethans, but of



Cleopatra. By L. Alma-Tadema, R.A.

Herrick, of Carew, Lovelace, Suckling, of all the Jacobean, Carolan, Queen Anne, and Georgian singers. What days and weeks might be spent in the quest of the Fair Women of the contemporaries of Shakespeare alone! What a lovely company born to beautiful life with the Christabel of Coleridge, the Haidee of Byron, the Highland Reaper

of Wordsworth! Think of all limned by Byron alone, by Wordsworth alone, though the loveliness of girlhood rather than of womanhood is oftenest painted by the latter. Neither Julia nor Parisina nor even Haidee is quite so nobly fair as that nameless vision whom the poet saw clad in beauty

“Like the night,
Of cloudless climes and starry skies :”

but all in all, what a gallery of Fair Women is given us by Byron! Not less numerous and lovelier still, those whom we owe to the genius of Keats: Madeline and Isabella, Lamia and Cynthia. Women and exquisite phantoms of women live for ever in the verse of Shelley, none perhaps with more wondrous radiance than Emilia Viviani, scarce visible to mortal eye, as could not but be when she and her creator were

“One hope between two wills, one will beneath
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
One heaven, one hell, one immortality.”

From the Rose Aylmer of Landor to the Rose of Tennyson! The very names create a loveliness before the mind. With the Fair Women of Browning, from tender Pompilia and blithe Pippa to Evelyn Hope, who might not dwell for a year and a day, and, as the Orientals say, wish the year to be for ever and the day to be eternal. The lovely pictures of the author of *A Dream of Fair Women* press upon one: and, hardly fewer and not less lovely, those limned by Mr. Swinburne. Of all modern creations of the Beauty of Woman, none surpasses the Iseult of *Tristram of Lyonesse*, not the Guenevere of the *Idylls*, not the Lilith of Rossetti. Strange House of Beauty that wherein the last-named guides us. There the Blessed Damozel, and Helen of Troy with Helen the Witch, Rose Mary and fair Scots Queen, Jenny of London wreckage, the lady of the bower, Pandora, Proserpina, Sibylla Palmifera, and Venus Verticordia, and many more, but above all she, Ideala, in many guises, under many names. Lovely, too, that Gallery wherein Rossetti is also our guide:¹ the Gallery where we encounter Beatrice;

¹ *Dante and his Circle.*

or, as she comes from a woodland copse in Spring, Guido Cavalcanti's Shepherd-maid—

“She came with waving kisses pale and bright,
 With rosy cheer, and loving eyes of flame,
 Guiding the lambs beneath her wand aright,
 Her naked feet still had the dews on them,
 As, singing like a lover, so she came ;
 Joyful, and fashioned for all ecstasy :”

or that almost incomparable Angiola of Verona, beloved of her poet Fazio degli Uberti, whose every motion as well as whose every feature has an ideal grace :—

“Soft as a peacock steps she, or as a stork
 Straight on herself, taller and statelier :
 ’Tis a good sight how every limb doth stir
 For ever in a womanly sweet way.”

Then what a wealth of loveliness do we owe to our younger weavers of dreams. Here, from one of the youngest and as yet scarce known, a lovely Woman whom many will recognise with tears and longing :—

“NO SAINT.

“Sometimes her mouth with deep regret
 Is grave, I know ;
 Sometimes her eyes with tears are wet
 As a bedewèd violet,
 And overflow.
 She has her human faults—and yet
 I love her so.

“And have I therefore loved amiss
 And been unwise ?
 Nay, I have only deeper bliss :
 I love her just because of this—
 Her sins and sighs ;
 And doubly tenderly I kiss
 Her mouth and eyes.”

At times we ask no more than this: not a line more of description, not a word of further detail. The mind loves to be its own alchemist.

It would be impossible to give an adequate hint, even, of the wealth of the lovely portraits by the Romancists—by the romancists of our

country alone. In this *genre* one room surpassed all others, even that of Scott, even that of Thomas Hardy; that, namely, of the "Brother of Women," if we may apply to George Meredith the designation given by him to Weyburn in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*—the latest and one of the most delightful of his novels, with a chapter in it (xxvii.) of incomparable freshness and charm, or comparable only with the famous riverside episode in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Even among the minor men, what living and delightful portraits: as, for example, that of Miss Susannah, by Peacock, in *Crotchet Castle*:—

"She was not one of the slender beauties of romance; she was—as plump as a partridge; her cheeks were two roses, not absolutely damask, yet verging thereupon; her lips twin cherries, of equal size; her nose regular, and almost Grecian; her forehead high, and delicately fair; her eyebrows symmetrically arched; her eyelashes, long, black, and silky, fitly corresponding with the beautiful tresses that hung among the leaves of the oak, like clusters of wandering grapes. Her eyes were yet to be seen; but how could he doubt that their opening would be the rising of the sun, when all that surrounded their fringy portals was radiant as 'the forehead of the morning sky'."

The women of George Meredith and Thomas Hardy alone would be numerous enough to fill the largest anteroom in our imagined Gallery. What room after room, then, from Richardson and Fielding to the youngest of our romancists, Stanley Weyman, and George Egerton, and Murray Gilchrist, to mention three of the most widely differing. Truly, vistas innumerable and seductive.

Of all that lovely company I think I bore away with me most haunting remembrance of three of a diviner beauty than even the most humanly beautiful. The first is by Keats, and is named Melancholy: and the words charged with this supreme magic are these:—

"She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
 And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
 Bidding adieu; and aching pleasure nigh
 Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
 Ay, in the very temple of Delight
 Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
 Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
 His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
 And be among her cloudy trophies hung."

The second is by Wordsworth, and is named Duty :—

“Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead’s most benignant grace;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face;
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in the footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are fresh and strong.”

The third is the Sibylla Palmifera of Rossetti :—

“Under the arch of Life, where love and death,
Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw
Beauty enthroned; and though her gaze struck awe,
I drew it in as simply as my breath.
Hers are the eyes which, over and beneath,
The sky and sea bend on thee,—which can draw
By sea or sky or woman, to one law,
The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath.

“This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise
Thy voice and hand shake still,—long known to thee
By flying hair and fluttering hem,—the beat
Following her daily of thy heart and feet,
How passionately and irretrievably,
In what fond flight, how many ways and days!”

So, with that wonderful last Vision in my eyes I turned to go. Nothing, even in that far from adequately seen room, even in all the rooms of the Kennaquhair Gallery, could surpass Sibylla Ideala.

As I turned I heard a voice, cold, calm, but with an undertone of deep emotion.

“After all,” it said, “I of all painters, whether with pigments or with words, have for man most nearly limned his Ideal Woman :—

“She was a Phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight;
A lovely Apparition, sent
To be a moment’s ornament;
Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair,
Like Twilight’s, too, her dusky hair;
But all things else about her drawn
From May-time and the cheerful Dawn
A dancing Shape, an Image gay,
To haunt, to startle, to way-lay.

"I saw her upon nearer view,
 A Spirit, yet a woman too!
 Her household motions light and free,
 And steps of virgin-liberty;
 A countenance in which did meet
 Sweet records, promises as sweet;
 A Creature, not too bright or good
 For human nature's daily food;
 For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
 Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

"And now I see with eye serene
 The very pulse of the machine;
 A Being breathing thoughtful breath,
 A traveller between life and death;
 The reason firm, the temperate will,
 Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill;
 A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
 To warn, to comfort, and command;
 And yet a Spirit still, and bright
 With something of angelic light."

"It is true! It is true!" whispered another and well-known voice, that of Robert Browning.

"But for *you*," I asked eagerly, "for *you*——"

But the Shade passed, and barely I caught the echo of a sigh—

"Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what's become of all the gold
 Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old."

The next moment I realised I was in Grafton Street, in a dark night, and that the rain slid glisteningly from lamp-post to lamp-post.

I too felt chilly and grown old. A young poet passed me, come likewise from Kennaquhair Gallery, and as he went he hummed

"And you may love the woman's form,
 But I the woman's heart."

I could not answer. My mind was full of my vision of Fair Women, but in my ears Browning's words still whispered mournfully.

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